★ EUROPEAN LEAGUES SPECIAL ★

World Soccer®

GLOBAL FOOTBALL SINCE 1960

July 2026

SEASON REVIEW

2025-26 SPECIAL

The complete record: Reviews and analysis of Europe's biggest leagues & UEFA's club finals

PLUS

- ESM GOLDEN SHOE
- CONCACAF CHAMPIONS CUP
- J. LEAGUE
- WOMEN'S WORLD CUP QUALIFYING

KELSEY media
9 770043 903385 07
£5.99
www.worldsoccer.com

AFICIONADOS
Football Travel

Immersive travel to some of the world's great football cities

Aficionados offers escorted group tours dedicated to exploring the culture and history of football cities across the world. From historic stadiums and founding clubs to the neighbourhoods and traditions that shaped the game. Insight and context is provided at key moments by football historians or journalists alongside the shared enjoyment of travelling with fellow football enthusiasts.

Fully escorted I Insight from football experts I Max group size of 18

The Basque Way

Bilbao & San Sebastian
Fri 18th Feb - Mon 22nd Feb 2027

What's included:

- Four nights in 4 star hotel with breakfast
- 2 matches including one La Liga
- Phil Ball (author of Morbo) accompanying the group throughout
- Guided tours of the Athletic Club and Real Sociedad museums
- Guided tour of the Guggenheim Museum
- Pintxos trail and traditional Basque dinner
- All transport on tour

Insights on tour from:
Phil Ball

Price from £1,095

To book visit www.aficionadosft.com
Or call us on +44(0) 1452 645649

ABTOT Member 5562

12899 ATOL PROTECTED

WorldSoccer
Global football intelligence since 1960

Contents

IN THIS ISSUE...

It's a little bit later than usual, and please forgive us for diverting your attention away from the World Cup, but here is our Season Review issue where we look back on the 2025-26 domestic campaign.

In the following pages we've covered all of Europe's major leagues, and plenty of its smaller ones, to bring you stories of dominant champions, unlikely underdogs, footballing dynasties being overthrown, and all the heroes and villains that made it happen – including a World Cup winner who bought his boyhood club – plus plenty more.

In next month's issue we'll have a comprehensive review of the 2026 World Cup – don't miss it.

Jamie Evans, Managing Editor

FEATURES

40 2025-26 season review
The complete record of the 2025-26 campaign

78 2027 Women's World Cup
Qualifying round-up for Brazil 2027

THE WORLD THIS MONTH
People in the news...on and off the pitch

4 In pictures
12 **Henry Winter** Did Pep Guardiola do enough?
14 **Keir Radnedge** FIFA & FIFPro reach agreement
16 **Jonathan Wilson** Mourinho back at Madrid
17 **On the radar** Euro Under-17 stars
18 Obituaries
20 Moves you might have missed
21 In numbers
22 ESM XI
24 ESM Golden Shoe

HEADLINERS
26 Milan

EYEWITNESS
28 Italy
32 Denmark
36 Switzerland
38 France

SEASON REVIEW
41 Stories of the season: Europe
48 Stories of the season: Asia
49 Stories of the season: Africa
49 Stories of the season: South America
52 UEFA Champions League
54 Europa League
56 Conference League
58 England
60 Spain
62 Italy
64 France
66 Germany
68 Portugal
70 Netherlands
72 Scotland

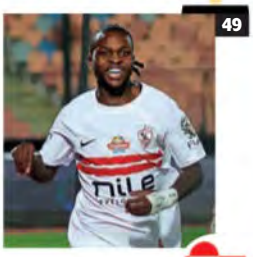
6 OF THE BEST
50 Under the radar coaches

SPECIAL REPORT
74 Greenland

MY BIGGEST GAME
99 Antonio Simoes

16

24



49

74

Follow World Soccer online
FOOTBALL 24-7

Follow @worldsoccermag Like World Soccer Magazine

SAVE MONEY ON WorldSoccer
Exclusive subscription offer
See page 10

World Service
Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents

82

82 CONCACAF Champions Cup
84 Argentina 2026 Apertura
86 Japan J1 100-Year Vision League
88 Cuba Cuban evolution
89 The Sweeper Tales from the 2011

PLUS 90 Results, tables, fixtures

In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

Poland...fans of Wisla Krakow celebrate after finally returning to the Polish top flight four years after being relegated

Serbia...Marko Arnautovic celebrates winning the Serbian double, his first trophies since joining Red Star Belgrade last summer

Argentina...a lonely River Plate fan sits in the empty stands after watching his team's Apertura final loss to Belgrano *(more on page 84)*

Spain...a mural outside the Bernabeu depicts the return of Jose Mourinho to Real Madrid *(more on page 16)*

Germany...players of Elversberg celebrate winning promotion to the Bundesliga *(more on page 45)*

France... Brest fans pay tribute to their coach Eric Roy, who passed away in June *(more on page 18)*

Spain...a pitch invasion at Deportivo La Coruna's Abanca-Riazor Stadium after the team sealed its return to La Liga for the first time since 2018

Boston...the Tartan Army make their way to Scotland's World Cup group clash v Morocco

Amman...Jordan fans gather in a Roman amphitheatre to watch their team take on Austria

Mexico City...the 2026 World Cup opening ceremony ahead of Mexico's clash with South Africa *(next month's issue features a full review of the 2026 World Cup)*

Kansas City... Curacao keeper Eloy Room makes one of his record-equalling 15 saves during his country's goalless draw with Ecuador

Vancouver...Nathan Saliba pays tribute to his Canada team-mate Ismael Kone, whose tournament was ended by injury during the 6-0 win over Qatar

San Francisco Bay Area... Paraguay's Miguel Almiron becomes the first player to be sent off for covering his mouth while speaking to an opponent

SUBSCRIBE FROM ONLY £32.99!

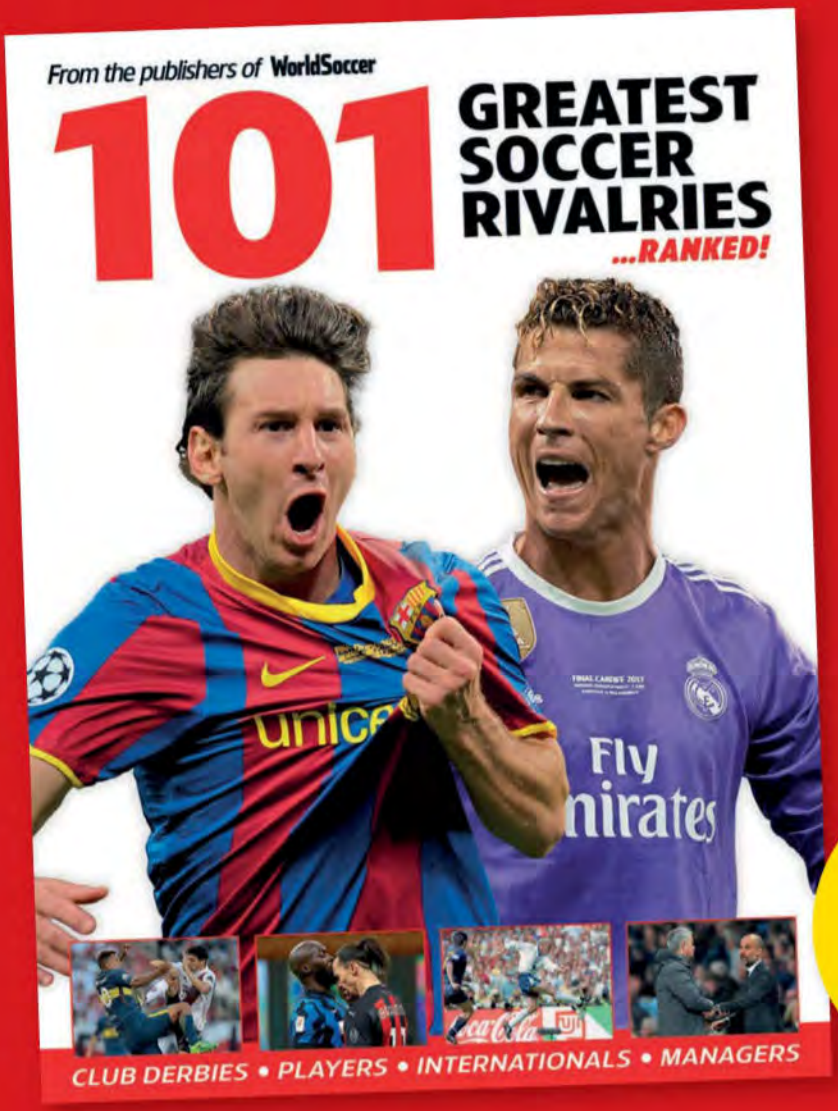
Delivery direct to your door

Great reasons to subscribe…

- Pay only **£32.99 every 6 months** – plus receive a copy of World Soccer's **101 Greatest Soccer Rivalries**
- Never miss an issue with **delivery direct** to your door
- **Big savings** – save up to **21%** on the full price*
- You'll also receive the *World Soccer* **e-newsletter**

PLUS...RECEIVE

101 GREATEST SOCCER RIVALRIES



3 EASY WAYS TO SUBSCRIBE:

1 VISIT shop.kelsey.co.uk/WSC

2 CALL 01959 543 747

3 SCAN THE QR CODE

WORTH £9.99

Calls charged at your standard network rate. Lines are open 8.30am-5pm Monday to Friday.

Terms & Conditions: UK Direct Debit: you will pay £32.99 every six months. Annual offers available. *Savings are based on the standard cover price plus postage. Overseas discounts available and discounts based on standard cover price and postage. Your subscription will start with the next available issue, and you will receive 13 issues in a year. Offer ends December 31, 2026. Gift is subject to availability and while stocks last. Gift available for UK customers only. Gift will not be dispatched until first payment has successfully been taken. Prices correct at time of printing and are subject to change. For full terms and conditions visit shop.kelsey.co.uk/terms. Data protection: We take great care in handling your personal details; these will only ever be used as set out in our privacy policy, which can be viewed at shop.kelsey.co.uk/privacy-policy. You may unsubscribe at any time. If you decide to cancel your subscription, we will put a stop to any further payments and will send the remaining issues that you have already paid for.

Henry WINTER
THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Did Pep do enough?

Pep Guardiola departs Manchester City with a near-perfect Premier League record – but should he have delivered more in Europe?

Walking away... Guardiola stepped down as Manchester City manager at the end of the season

Pep Guardiola was a visionary and missionary during his decade in England. He did more than transform Manchester City into a winning machine. He changed the culture of English football. When he arrived in 2016, I urged the Football Association to invite him to the National Football Centre at St George's Park to talk to young coaches doing their badges, to enlighten them tactically.

That offer never materialised but, anyway, Guardiola selflessly gave of his time to many aspiring managers, whether in his or their office after games or letting them visit the Campus and watch training. Through word and deed, Guardiola inspired the English to think more deeply about the game, to build more from the back and have full-backs inverting into midfield. He won six titles, some with false nines like Phil Foden, some with real nines like Erling Haaland. He developed players for the England national side like Nico O'Reilly. He's done so much and the English owe Guardiola a debt of gratitude. It needs adding that allegations of financial breaches have yet to be clarified and City vigorously deny any wrongdoing.

Now he's stepped down at City. Almost 600 games inevitably takes a physical and mental toll on such an intense character. He needs a break. As he leaves, Guardiola deservedly enjoys plenty of plaudits for his astonishing work. Amidst all the praise there has to be one note of perspective: is one Champions League title in ten attempts with such resources good enough? Should building on the work of predecessors like Manuel Pellegrini, who guided City to a semi-final in the season before Guardiola

arrived, have produced better returns?

Guardiola was brought in by City's Abu Dhabi owners to win the Champions League. That was clear. English titles were all well and good, and especially joyous to City supporters who love the local and national bragging rights, but owners love the Champions League. It gives cache in their rarefied circles, something to talk about on the yacht or in the polo marquee.

Guardiola had a reputation from his Barcelona days for getting his hands on the coveted cup with the big ears. At Camp Nou, Guardiola had Lionel Messi, who was key to their successes in 2009 and 2011, both against Manchester United, which made him even more of a popular draw with City fans. City had nobody of Messi's stellar calibre. They had talents like David Silva, Sergio Aguero, Raheem Sterling and Yaya Toure when Guardiola arrived but it was more about the team ethos, and Guardiola's tactics, than relying on a Messi type to conjure up magic.

So they set out on this journey, season after season, having hope eclipsed by Monaco in the round of 16 in 2017, then Liverpool in the quarter-finals before a devastating aggregate quarter-final defeat to Tottenham Hotspur after Sterling's late winner was ruled out for offside by VAR. Then Lyon in the truncated quarter-final in the age of COVID and then, in 2021, to a final, to Porto to face Chelsea. Such hope. But then came Guardiola's team-sheet. I was in the Estadio Do Dragao, staring at the line-up an hour before kick-off. Make it make sense, Pep. No holding midfielders. No Rodri nor Fernandinho. Benched. Just "silky" Ilkay Gundogan in the centre with Foden and David Silva close by, more playmakers than destroyers, against Jorginho and N'Golo Kante.

Chelsea inevitably took control of the centre. Fernandinho came on midway through the second half but Chelsea led through Kai Havertz by then and held on. More heartache. Had Guardiola lost his golden touch?

Sometimes in Europe Guardiola could be too clever, perhaps even overthinking situations, especially against better sides. He rarely made such mistakes in the Premier League as if he felt City had enough strengths to blow opponents away, so he could be more positive. In attempting to explain away the loss, Guardiola could also point to Antonio Rudiger robustly challenging Kevin De Bruyne, who departed because of the concussion protocol. Guardiola could lament Riyad Mahrez missing with a half-volley in the last minute. But City didn't deserve to win.

Silver medallist... Guardiola after the 2021 Champions League final

English titles were all well and good – but owners love the Champions League

They tried again the following year, and were even leading by two goals heading towards extra-time in the Bernabeu semi-final second leg before Rodrygo struck twice. Karim Benzema finished City off in extra-time. It was brutal but City lifted themselves in 2023, doing it the hard way, beating Bayern Munich and Real Madrid to reach the final against Internazionale in Istanbul. The treble awaited.

Here was Guardiola at his most inspired. He had John Stones alongside Rodri in midfield and the Englishman was immense. I bumped into Stones' parents shortly afterwards and they were absolutely delighted, knowing the sacrifices that John had made to reach the top. Now he was a champion of Europe. And heading off to Ibiza in a private jet.

City really should have built on that. Their new rivalry with Real Madrid saw them lose on penalties in the quarter-finals in 2024, sliced apart home and away in the knockout phase play-offs in 2025 and again in the round of 16 this year.

All this trip down memory lane is partly to highlight how deep Guardiola kept taking City into Europe's elite competition season after season. But for such an exceptional and ambitious coach he will surely be disappointed at only one Champions League in ten attempts. Carlo Ancelotti is two Champions Leagues ahead of Guardiola with five triumphs, and that must rankle such a competitive individual.

Grudge club... Pep was knocked out three times by Real Madrid

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

A new era for FIFA and FIFPro relations

The governing body and the global players' union reach a new agreement that could change the way football is run

Peace deal...FIFA president Gianni Infantino and his FIFPro counterpart Sergio Marchi at May's FIFA Congress in Paraguay

Buried under a tonnage of World Cup hyperbole, TV self-promotion, commercial hoopla and general marketing supra-overkill, an item of long-term importance went unremarked on the eve of the finals: FIFA and FIFPro agreed a peace deal.

For context, most of the past 60 years has seen the international players' union banging its head in vain against the walls of the world game's establishment. FIFA even sought, only last year, to create its own player welfare operation. That was pretty rich considering that the escalating concern owed much to its own expansion of high-stress international competitions.

Unusually, common sense appears to have prevailed with a framework for meaningful debate. For FIFPro, working within the system must be more effective than shouting from out in the street; as for FIFA, the threat of being dragged for ever and a day through the interminable web of European courts was an irritating thorn in the side.

The antagonism has a long history, with FIFPro frequently ignored or obstructed by FIFA. Here is a never-ending source of bafflement. After all, both sides share the same aim in promoting the health of the game and the health and general welfare of its participants. Don't they?

Bear in mind the context of FIFPro's creation by the associations of French, Dutch, English, Italian and Scottish players in Paris in December 1965: this was only five years after the PFA-driven end of the maximum wage in English football and two years after the High Court in London had outlawed the "retain and transfer" system in the George Eastham case. World Cup hero Raymond Kopa was at the forefront of a similar resistance to the old order in France.

Associations, leagues and clubs trembled for fear of a revolution rooted around the opaque workings of the reincarnated Roman slave market also known as football's

transfer system, the buying and selling of human flesh and blood.

FIFPro complained incessantly and in vain that FIFA regulations served the interests of clubs and agents rather than the players. Hence its support for the court fight by Belgian player Jean-Marc Bosman for his right of free movement at the end of his contract. Even the establishment failed to see the eventual writing on the Luxembourg wall in 1995. Then-UEFA president Lennart Johansson spoke for the establishment when he told me: "This doesn't affect us; we are a Swiss organisation, outside the EU."

So much he knew.

Ultimately the Bosman case resulted in far more than the original claim in leading to the end of foreign player restrictions and thus revolutionising not merely the transfer system but the shape of the game itself. Where Europe led, kicking and screaming, FIFA had little option but to follow. However it was not until 2017 that a peace deal was agreed over a FIFPro complaint to the European Commission that FIFA's transfer rules were anti-competitive, unjustified and illegal.

This is a realm in which FIFA and UEFA hate to be drawn because it falls under the EU's competition law which demands that monopolies, such as sports governing bodies, must work hard to justify the right to exceptional status.

In the 2020s, the dispute shifted from transfer freedom to player welfare, calendar congestion and workload. FIFPro grew increasingly worried that FIFA's expansion of the World Cup, introduction of the Club World Cup and UEFA's creation of a busy Nations League disregarded physical and mental pressure on players – particularly the star names on whose glitz the lucrative attraction to sponsors and broadcasters rested.

FIFPro accused FIFA of a conflict of interest when acting as both regulator and commercial operator; FIFA insisted it was acting in the interests of the game and accused FIFPro of refusing constructive dialogue. By 2024 and 2025, the relationship had broken down entirely.

FIFPro president Sergio Marchi welcomed "an important step forward for football," while FIFA supremo Gianni Infantino hailed "a new era in FIFA's relationship with FIFPro"

Last November FIFA excluded FIFPro from wide-ranging talks about player welfare. President Gianni Infantino and secretary-general Mattias Grafstrom led a FIFA delegation in what it described as "fruitful discussions with players' unions from across the world" in Rabat, Morocco ahead of the final of the Under-17 Women's World Cup.

Attendees included "members of the [FIFA] Players' Voice Panel, including honorary captain George Weah, and several legends and world champions from men's and women's football" as well as representatives from 30 players' unions.

Club World Cup...last summer's tournament was a point of contention for FIFA and FIFPro

The credibility of the exercise was undermined by the failure to involve FIFPro, which attacked FIFA's promotion of "fake or 'yellow' unions" as running counter to International Labour Organization conventions. It also pressed on in supporting a complaint by European Leagues and FIFPro Europe over FIFA's imposition of the International Match Calendar.

Then, barely noticed on the eve of the World Cup, a breakthrough emerged. A co-operation agreement between FIFA and FIFPro promised players a formal role in governance and set up a framework for negotiating changes to the transfer system, player welfare rules and rest periods.

The deal, which runs until December 2031, formally recognises FIFPro as the global union for professional players. This will be reflected in FIFPro being granted a seat on FIFA Council for the first time and places player representatives on FIFA's legal committees. In return, FIFPro and its member unions will withdraw all current lawsuits against FIFA and end support for any other legal claims.

The agreement also establishes a $20 million fund for the 2026-2029 period to support player claims over unpaid salaries.

FIFPro president Sergio Marchi welcomed "an important step forward for football," while FIFA supremo Gianni Infantino hailed "a new era in FIFA's relationship with FIFPro".

Doubtless all this could have been achieved much earlier if fan support could have been engaged at headlines level by even a handful of the game's superstars. But, cocooned within their multi-million bubbles, they may struggle to connect with the wider issues of the profession.

Pity. "Names" have proved a valuable commodity in engaging the fans in the push for progress. Who dares be the next Eastham or Kopa or Bosman?

BOOKS THIS MONTH

FROM MOORE TO MESSI
By Mark Orton
(Pitch Publishing, £25)

From Moore to Messi: A History of the Argentine National Football Team 1902-2026 is the fascinating story of *La Albiceleste*, and how it became a major symbol of national identity for the people of the South American nation. From its first international in 1902 with a side largely of British and Irish origin to the World Cup wins of 1978, 1986 and 2022, it charts all the highs and lows.

ROBERTO BAGGIO: THE WORLD CUP YEARS
By Mark Gordon
(Pitch Publishing, £14.99)

Across three World Cups, Italy talisman Roberto Baggio crafted some of the most iconic moments in the tournament's history. This riveting book relives the attacking maestro's contributions in 1990, 1994 and 1998. It looks at the stories surrounding the "Divine Ponytail" and the magic he provided on the world stage.

Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Jose Mourinho: an old solution to a new problem

Is the re-hiring of Mourinho as Real Madrid manager destined for failure?

Jose Mourinho has signed a three-year contract to be manager of Real Madrid, but does anybody really expect him to be there in 2029?

Mourinho's reappointment was one of those events in football that somehow managed to feel both inevitable and utterly implausible at the same time. Perhaps, after all the acrimony of his departure 13 years ago, there is a fairy-tale return, another league title and a Champions League, a great coda to a great career – but it feels unlikely, both because of the squad and because of Mourinho.

The dangers of a world run by delusional old men are all around. Life changes constantly, and it becomes harder and harder to evolve with age. Florentino Perez is 79 and seems unable to realise or to accept that the world has moved on; he is still fighting his wars with old strategies and techniques. Real Madrid clearly have a problem. Their squad is dysfunctional, a seething mass of competing egos.

Xabi Alonso left Bayer Leverkusen as one of the brightest young minds in coaching, but within months he had been chewed up and spat out by Madrid. His intellectual approach simply didn't work with players so coddled and spoiled that they'd feign snoring during video analysis sessions. Alonso is a quiet and thoughtful man, without the overt charisma and ego of more authoritarian head coaches. Appointing him seemed to signal a change in the Madrid leadership, a move away from celebrity footballers to a system. Alonso had barely arrived before it became apparent it wasn't going to work and Perez was regretting the appointment.

Real return...Jose Mourinho has been reappointed 13 years after leaving Madrid

Perez has at least identified the problem: a bunch of ill-disciplined players who have the talent to win games without proper organisation, but whose refusal to do the boring and difficult bits means they struggle to reach their full potential. Under Perez that's been the Madrid way. To an extent it works, as 15 European Cup and Champions League wins attest. The problem is that when it goes wrong, it goes badly wrong. To finish eight points behind a flawed Barcelona is underachievement on a massive scale; that Madrid still got 86 points this season shows just how weak much of the league is. This was a season that included a 4-0 defeat to Paris Saint-Germain, a 5-2 defeat to city rivals Atletico and a 6-4 aggregate Champions League defeat to Bayern Munich that was much worse than that makes it sound. This is a squad in which there are clear hierarchies, leading to frustration from players who feel they are always the ones taken off or left out, and fights around the table-tennis table.

> Perhaps, after all the acrimony of his departure 13 years ago, there is a fairy-tale return, another league title and a Champions League, but it feels unlikely

But Perez's solution to the problem is the solution of a previous generation: a tough, uncompromising coach who will take no prisoners. Mourinho used to be that figure.

Reunited...Florentino Perez first hired Mourinho in 2010

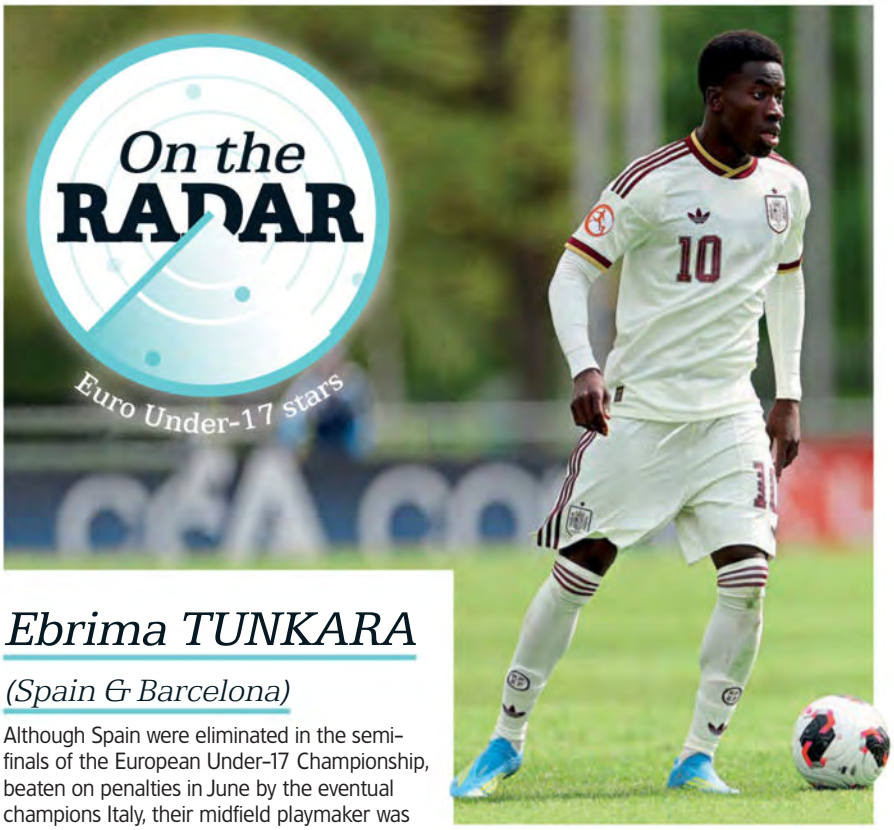
But he is now 63. His powers are waning. He did a remarkable job in his previous stint at Madrid, despite his obsession with fielding a "*trivote*" of holding midfielders. He managed, eventually, to topple Pep Guardiola's Barcelona, winning the league title in 2011-12. Guardiola was so exhausted he took a year out of football; Mourinho had done what he was brought in to do.

But the following season, it was Mourinho who seemed exhausted. There were stories of dressing-room rifts, while players seemed genuinely concerned that they were left to improvise too much in attacking situations. Although Mourinho did subsequently win the Premier League with Chelsea in 2014-15, he has never really been the same since.

Very few coaches, even the very best, ever have more than a decade at the very top. Guardiola is a notable exception in having been able to keep evolving for almost 20 years. Mourinho's instinctive caution, his willingness to defend, seem to have been ossified by his desire to be proven right. His Porto team would press regularly and often; by the time he was at Spurs he seemed obsessed by sitting in a low block, as though he had to prove himself the anti-Guardiola. There have been recent concerns as well about the fitness of his sides. There is a sense the game has moved away from him; that all he has going for him at Madrid is a willingness to be unpopular.

What is needed, anyway, is a cultural reset. The oddity is that Madrid had seemed to be undergoing that, signing the likes of Jude Bellingham, Aurelien Tchouameni and Eduardo Camavinga when they were on the way up, rather than splurging on huge fully formed stars. But then Perez became obsessed by signing Kylian Mbappe and the retreat into celebrity signings began.

But Mourinho is not going to lead the club to a more modern culture; quite the reverse. Even if he is a fix, he will likely be a short-term one. Will modern players really respond to his autocratic ways? And even if they do, is Mourinho modern enough tactically to thrive?



Ebrima TUNKARA

(Spain & Barcelona)

Although Spain were eliminated in the semi-finals of the European Under-17 Championship, beaten on penalties in June by the eventual champions Italy, their midfield playmaker was named Player of the Tournament by UEFA.

Unsurprisingly to anyone who saw his four assists, his immense composure in possession, his 23 key passes, his ability to wriggle through tight spaces or glide forward with the ball, Tunkara is a product of *La Masia*. Born in the Gambia, he joined the Barcelona academy when he was eight years old and is highly regarded within the club, even earning comparisons with Lamine Yamal thanks to his left foot and tendency to drift over to the right wing. Last year, aged 15, he played in the UEFA Youth League alongside players four years older than him, and later this summer he is set to join Hansi Flick's first-team squad for pre-season.

Christian LUPO
(Italy & Lecce)
Didn't miss a second of Italy's run to the trophy, keeping two clean sheets in the group stage and then proving a penalty-shootout hero in both the semi-final and final.

Gianluca OKON
(Italy & Club Brugge)
Shone at the base of Italy's midfield diamond with his combination of physicality and brilliant passing range. The son of former Australia international Paul and younger brother of current Socceroo Paul Okon-Engstler.

Sami EL MORABET
(Belgium & Genk)
An enterprising right-back, he was heavily involved in the final v Italy – which Belgium lost on penalties – taking more touches (99) than any other player on the pitch.

Mikkel BRO HANSEN
(Denmark & Bodo/Glimt)
Fox in the box No.9, who did his part for Denmark by scoring twice before their group-stage exit. Already has top-flight experience for his club side, and has been linked with a move to Barcelona.

"Bobby is a gentleman of football and Chelsea Football Club. If you want an ambassador, someone who shows what the club means and who transcends the generations, he is the man"

Frank Lampard on Bobby Tambling, who he replaced as Chelsea's all-time record goalscorer

OBITUARIES

Paraskevas ANTZAS
(1976–2026)
Seven-time Greek league champion and three-time cup winner at the heart of defence for Olympiacos between 1999 and 2009. Won 26 caps but missed out on Greece's Euro 2004 win after brief retirement. Died from complications arising from ALS, the most common form of motor neurone disease.

Bryan BERGOUGNOUX
(1983-2026)
Former midfielder capped 21 times for France's Under-21s who played for Lyon, Toulouse, Chateauroux, Omonia Nicosia and Tours. Also managed the latter and was assistant coach at Le Havre.

BRITO
(1939-2026)
Central defender in the Brazil team that famously won the World Cup trophy for the third time in Mexico in 1970. Hercules de Brito Ruas starred for seven Brazilian clubs, notably Vasco da Gama on their famous 1957 European summer tour in which they won the Tournoi de Paris and the Trofeo Teresa Herrera in La Coruna. Also played in Canada and Venezuela.

Jerry DE JONG
(1964-2026)
Surinamese-born defender who won three caps for the Netherlands in 1990-91 while starring at PSV. Father of former *Oranje*, Ajax, Manchester City and Milan midfielder Nigel de Jong.

PSV defender...Jerry de Jong in 1992

GEOVANI Silva
(1964-2026)
Forward who helped Brazil win the Copa America in 1989 after the U20 World Cup in 1983, when he won the Golden Ball and Golden Boot. Five times a Rio state champion with Vasco da Gama, Geovani also had spells in Italy with Bologna, and Germany with Karlsruhe.

Greece international ...Paraskevas Antzas

Ecuador defender ...Raul Guerron

World Cup victor... Brazil defender Brito

LEIVINHA
(1949-2026)
Joao Leiva Campos Filho was a fluent "old-fashioned" inside-forward who made his name with Portuguesa before achieving stardom in the early 1970s with Palmeiras. Won two national and two Sao Paulo state titles, before being sold to Atletico Madrid with whom he won both the Spanish league and cup.

Played 21 times for Brazil, including three games at the 1974 World Cup finals, and scored seven goals including the *Selecao's* 1,000th, against Bolivia, at the Maracana on May 27, 1973.

Raul GUERRON
(1976-2026)
Ex-Deportivo Quito defender, whose 34 caps included Ecuador's World Cup finals debut in 2002 in Japan and South Korea.

Alex HUGHES
(1987-2026)
Son of Wales and Manchester United legend Mark, Alex Hughes was working as the head of scouting for Grimsby Town when he passed away in June.

Igoris KIRILOVAS
(1971-2026)
Won 27 caps in midfield for newly independent Lithuania between 1991 and 1998. Twice winner of the Baltic Cup in 1991 and 1998.

Egon LOY
(1931-2026)
Goalkeeper for Eintracht Frankfurt on the wrong end of Ferenc Puskas and Alfredo Di Stefano's star showing in the iconic 7-3 defeat by Real Madrid in the 1960 European Cup final. Won the German championship in 1959 with Frankfurt for whom he played between 1954 and his retirement in 1967.

1960 European Cup final...Egon Loy watches another Real Madrid goal go in

Kenny JACKETT
(1962-2026)
One-club man at Watford who made 428 appearances for the Hornets and won 31 caps for Wales. After retiring early due to a knee injury, he embarked upon a long coaching career across the English Football League, including stints at Watford, Millwall, Wolverhampton Wanderers, Swansea City, Rotherham United, Portsmouth and Leyton Orient.

Watford legend...Kenny Jackett

Tom LUND
(1950-2026)
Lund was the greatest Norwegian footballer of his generation, but a dislike of flying meant he played only for hometown club Lillestrom. Among the many offers he rejected from major foreign clubs was one from Ajax who, in 1973, wanted him to take the place of the departing Johan Cruyff.

Lund made his Norway debut in 1971 when Lillestrom were then in the third division. He led them to a double promotion, league title in 1976 then league and cup double in 1977. They won the cup again in 1978 and 1981. In 14 seasons, Lund amassed 197 goals in 348 appearances for the club.

His 12 goals in 47 internationals included Norway's equaliser in the famous 2-1 victory over England in 1981 – the first time they had ever beaten the Three Lions.

As a coach, Lund led Lillestrom to cup success in 1985 and the league championship in 1986. A statue in his honour stands outside the club's Arasen stadium, but he said: "I greatly appreciate the feelings and the people behind it, but the statue makes me a little uncomfortable. It's a bit much. I'm relatively modest. It would be fine to just be an ex-footballer."

"Tom Lund is the Messiah of Norwegian football"

Ron Greenwood, who was the first-ever England manager to lose to Norway

Underdogs...Eric Roy led Brest to the Champions League knockout rounds in 2024-25

Eric ROY
(1967-2026)
The mastermind behind one of the most remarkable Champions League stories of recent years, guiding Brest to the knockout stages in the 2024-25 season, their first-ever campaign at the highest level. When he passed away in June, a statement by his family revealed he had been battling pancreatic cancer for more than three years. Born in Nice, he played in midfield for his hometown club twice, either side of spells with Toulon, Lyon, Marseille, Sunderland, Troyes and Rayo Vallecano.

Parviz GHELICHKHANI
(1945-2026)
One of Iran's finest holding midfielders and captain at the 1972 and 1976 Olympic Games. Won three Asian Cups as well as an Asian Games title and scorer of 12 goals in 64 internationals. League champion with Esteghlal (then known as Taj) and twice Iran Footballer of the Year. His opposition to the regime after the Iranian Revolution cost him a place at the 1978 World Cup. Later moved to the United States before settling in France.

Kenzo KIES
(2005-2026)
Young French winger who was on the books at Guingamp in Ligue 2 and progressed through the youth academies of Lyon and Saint-Etienne.

Leif NIELSEN
(1942-2026)
Goalkeeper who was Denmark's Player of the Year in 1966 and won 28 caps between 1964 and 1967. One of the great stars of BK Frem who later played for Houston Stars and Greenock Morton.

Victor UDOH
(2004-2026)
Young Nigerian forward who came through the Antwerp academy and joined Southampton in February 2025 but left after just six months to sign for Czech outfit Dynamo Ceske Budejovice.

Jose SANFILIPPO
(1935-2026)
"El Nene" (The Kid) Sanfilippo was one of the most exciting and extrovert Argentinian cracks of the late 1950s and 1960s. He burst into the San Lorenzo attack in 1953 at just 18. His predatory instincts saw him crowned as Primera Division top scorer for four consecutive seasons between 1958 and 1961.

In 1963, he was sold for a then-record 25 million pesos to Boca Juniors who saw him as the man to overthrow Santos in the Copa Libertadores. Instead they lost to Pele and Co. in the final.

A year later, Sanfilippo took his goalscoring talents to Nacional in Uruguay then Bangu and Bahia in Brazil. In 1972, he returned to San Lorenzo for a final flourish, helping them win the Metropolitano and Nacional double.

For Argentina he was a reserve for the triumphant 1957 Copa America team, but was called up again for the 1958 and 1962 World Cups. Always outspoken, on politics as much as football, Sanfilippo was a member of the delegation who escorted Juan Domingo Peron back from exile in Spain in 1975.

Hotshot striker... Jose Sanfilippo

Chelsea legend... Bobby Tambling

Alcides SOSA
(1944-2026)
Outstanding centre-back in Olimpia Asuncion's breakthrough triumph in the Copa Libertadores in 1979. Also won six Paraguayan league titles (four with Olimpia, two with Club Guarani), and 48 caps for the Paraguay national team. Took great personal pride in having played 75 Libertadores ties without ever being sent off.

Jorge URQUIA
(1946-2026)
Played in attack for Honduras in the defeat by El Salvador in the "football war" World Cup qualifiers in 1969. Scored three goals in only 11 internationals, being surprisingly omitted from the 1982 World Cup squad. Won the CONCACAF Champions Cup in 1972 with Olimpia from Tegucigalpa and played in Spain for Mallorca and Alaves.

Michel STIEVENARD
(1937-2026)
Forward who scored 106 goals in 405 league games in the 1950s and 1960s for Lens and Angers. Short-lived national team career featured his only two caps as 1960 European Championship hosts France collapsed 5-4 against Yugoslavia in the semi-finals then lost the third-place play-off 2-0 to Czechoslovakia.

Bobby TAMBLING
(1941-2026)
Possessor of a lethal left foot, Tambling was Chelsea's all-time top scorer with 202 goals for 47 years until being overtaken by Frank Lampard in 2013.

Tambling joined Chelsea as a 15-year-old schoolboy then scored the winning goal on a dream senior debut two years later against West Ham United. Named club captain by manager Tommy Docherty at just 21, his goals led an exciting young team to promotion. Scored the opening goal to secure the 1965 League Cup, the club's first knockout trophy triumph.

Unlucky to have won only three caps for England in the 1960s. Later played for Crystal Palace before moving to the Republic of Ireland where he won a league title with Cork Celtic.

Words by Keir Radnedge, Mark Gleeson & Jamie Evans

"Four years have passed. Four championships. Thousands of hugs. Millions of memories…Thank you Galatasaray"

Argentine striker Mauro Icardi reveals that he is leaving Galatasaray after helping them win four titles in a row

12 MOVES *you might have missed…*

TRANSFERS ★ LOANS ★ SACKINGS ★ HIRINGS ★ SWITCHES ★ RETIREMENTS

Martin DEMICHELIS

Despite being relegated from La Liga with Mallorca, the Argentine coach replaced Ole Werner at **RB Leipzig**. Elsewhere in the Red Bull group, Salzburg hired Rangers' Danny Rohl.

Maurizio SARRI

The former Chelsea manager was appointed by **Atalanta** after the sacking of Raffaele Palladino, with ex-Italy boss Gennaro Gattuso replacing Sarri as coach of Lazio.

Pierre SAGE

The Lens boss was hired by **Crystal Palace** to replace Oliver Glasner and replaced by Dino Toppmoller, who coincidentally succeeded Glasner at Eintracht Frankfurt in 2023.

Carles MARTINEZ NOVELL

Perhaps hoping to repeat the success of Xabi Alonso, **Bayer Leverkusen** hired their second-ever Spanish coach with Martinez Novell joining from Toulouse.

Kerim ALAJBEGOVIC

The electric Bosnia & Herzegovina winger will also be at **Leverkusen** next season, after they activated a buy-back option and re-signed the 18-year-old from Red Bull Salzburg.

Francesco CAMARDA

The youngest player in Serie A history made his loan move from **Milan** to Lecce permanent, only for the *Rossoneri* to instantly activate a buy-back clause and re-sign him.

Aleksandar STANKOVIC

Internazionale activated their buy-back option to re-sign the promising midfielder from Club Brugge. His father, Red Star Belgrade head coach Dejan, also played for Inter.

Andre SILVA

Silva was one of the finest young talents in European football when he left **Porto** for Milan in 2017. Nine years on, he's back at his first club after leaving Spanish side Elche.

Giovanni VAN BRONCKHORST

After **Feyenoord** sacked Robin van Persie they re-hired Van Bronckhorst, who led his hometown club to the title in 2016-17 and last season assisted Arne Slot at Liverpool.

Phil NEVILLE

With **Portland Timbers** lying third from bottom of the MLS Western Conference table, the club parted company with the former England Women and Inter Miami boss.

Rodolfo ARRUABARRENA

The Argentine returned to **Boca Juniors**, where he won the Copa Libertadores as a player in 2000 and the league as a coach in 2015, after ten years in Asia and Africa.

Rolando MARAN

After the departure of ex-Brazil left-back Sylvinho, **Albania** appointed the experienced Italian. Elsewhere, Slovakia re-hired Vladimir Weiss and Congo turned to Claude Le Roy.

"My advice would be to hire Pep Guardiola"

Antonio Conte, who recently stepped down from managing Napoli, when asked if he could be Italy's next head coach

Round-up in numbers

Check out the facts and stats that have caught our eye in the world of football…

68%

Vote share won by Giovanni Malago in becoming the new president of the Italian Football Federation. His first task is hiring a new national team coach, with former *Azzurri* bosses Antonio Conte and Roberto Mancini reportedly in the running.

100,000

Proposed capacity of Manchester United's new stadium after the club purchased the majority of the land for the project dubbed "Wembley of the North".

47.3%

Kieran McKenna's win rate at Ipswich Town before he stepped down as head coach, shortly after leading them to the Premier League for the second time. Of managers with 50 games or more in charge of the Tractor Boys, only Sir Alf Ramsey has a better record.

508

Appearances made for Chelsea by Cesar Azpilicueta, more than any other foreign player in the club's history. The Spanish defender retired after a season at Sevilla, whom he joined from Atletico Madrid last summer.

120

Denmark caps for Kasper Schmeichel (nine fewer than his father Peter), who retired after a two-year spell with Scottish champions Celtic.

Hanging up his gloves… Schmeichel's last cap was against Scotland in November

€9m

Reported fee paid by Bayer Leverkusen for Hertha Berlin midfielder Kennet Eichhorn, making the highly-rated 16-year-old one of the most expensive German teenagers of all time.

***Wunderkind…* Eichhorn in action for Hertha Berlin**

11

Coaches to have managed both Lisbon giants Sporting and Benfica after Marco Silva was appointed by the latter to replace Jose Mourinho, 11 years after leaving the Lions.

€101m

Valuation of Lyon after the Ligue 1 side were bought by American businesswoman Michele Kang, who already owns the women's team (see last month's issue), bringing an end to John Textor's ownership of the club.

5

Top-flight managers in Spain and England who were born in Gipuzkoa, a tiny province of the Basque Country, after Benat San Jose of Rayo Vallecano joined Mikel Arteta (Arsenal), Unai Emery (Aston Villa), Xabi Alonso (Chelsea) and Andoni Iraola (Liverpool).

1

The first-ever edition of FIFA's Under-15 World Cup will take place next year in Azerbaijan, with Russia set to be allowed to take part after it was announced it'll be open to "all FIFA Member Associations".

964

Career appearances made by James Milner, who announced his retirement at the age of 41 after leaving Brighton.

1

Andres Iniesta took his first managerial role after being appointed to manage Gulf United in the United Arab Emirates.

TRANSFER ROUND-UP

£69.3m	***Anthony GORDON***	*(Newcastle United to Barcelona)*
£55m	***Jeremy JACQUET***	*(Rennes to Liverpool)*
£52m	***Jan Paul VAN HECKE***	*(Brighton to Tottenham Hotspur)*
£51.8m	***Marc CUCURELLA***	*(Chelsea to Real Madrid)*
£43.2m	***Rasmus HOJLUND***	*(Manchester United to Napoli)**
£40m	***Geovany QUENDA***	*(Sporting to Chelsea)*
£35m	***EDERSON***	*(Atalanta to Manchester United)*
£34.5m	***Piero HINCAPIE***	*(Bayer Leverkusen to Arsenal)**
£34.5m	***Victor MUNOZ***	*(Osasuna to Liverpool)*
£25.8m	***Rodrigo ZALAZAR***	*(Braga to Sporting)*
£25m	***Afonso MOREIRA***	*(Lyon to Bayer Leverkusen)*
£21.6m	***Patrick ZABI***	*(Reims to Paris FC)*
£21.6m	***Ewen JAOUEN***	*(Reims to Newcastle United)*
£21.6m	***Emmanuel EMEGHA***	*(Strasbourg to Chelsea)*
£21.6m	***Donyell MALEN***	*(Aston Villa to Roma)**
£21.5m	***Zadok YOHANNA***	*(AIK to Brighton)*
£19.9m	***Aleksandar STANKOVIC***	*(Club Brugge to Internazionale)*
£17.8m	***Issa DOUMBIA***	*(Venezia to Sporting)*
£17.3m	***Merlin ROHL***	*(Freiburg to Everton)**

**Loan deals made permanent*

Barca new boy… Anthony Gordon is unveiled at Camp Nou

FREE TRANSFERS

Martin DUBRAVKA	*(Burnley to Tottenham Hotspur)*
Raul JIMENEZ	*(Fulham to Wolverhampton Wanderers)*
Ibrahima KONATE	*(Liverpool to Real Madrid)*
Andy ROBERTSON	*(Liverpool to Tottenham Hotspur)*
Marcos SENESI	*(Bournemouth to Tottenham Hotspur)*
Bernardo SILVA	*(Manchester City to Real Madrid)*
Kieran TRIPPIER	*(Newcastle United to Wolverhampton Wanderers)*

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

SEASON RANKINGS
Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

David Raya (Arsenal)	32
Gianluigi Donnarumma (Manchester City)	8
Mike Maignan (Milan)	6
Anatoliy Trubin (Benfica)	6
Joan Garcia (Barcelona)	5
Thibaut Courtois (Real Madrid)	4
Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich)	3
Mile Svilar (Roma)	3
Alisson (Liverpool)	2
Marco Carnesecchi (Atalanta)	2
Gregor Kobel (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Yann Sommer (Internazionale)	2
Oliver Baumann (Hoffenheim)	1
Jean Butez (Como)	1
Ugurcan Cakir (Galatasaray)	1
Lucas Chevalier (PSG)	1
Diogo Costa (Porto)	1
Peter Gulacsi (RB Leipzig)	1
Dean Henderson (Crystal Palace)	1
Luiz Junior (Villarreal)	1
Unai Marrero (Real Sociedad)	1
Emiliano Martinez (Aston Villa)	1
Robin Risser (Lens)	1
Geronimo Rulli (Marseille)	1
Matvey Safonov (PSG)	1

DEFENDERS

Gabriel (Arsenal)	29
William Saliba (Arsenal)	25
Nuno Mendes (PSG)	21
Achraf Hakimi (PSG)	18
Nico O'Reilly (Manchester City)	16
Federico Dimarco (Internazionale)	15
Jurrien Timber (Arsenal)	13
Konrad Laimer (Bayern Munich)	11
Virgil van Dijk (Liverpool)	10
Jules Kounde (Barcelona)	9
Jonathan Tah (Bayern Munich)	8
Dayot Upamecano (Bayern Munich)	8
Alex Grimaldo (Bayer Leverkusen)	7
Pau Cubarsi (Barcelona)	6
Marc Guehi (Manchester City)	6
Willian Pacho (PSG)	6
Manuel Akanji (Internazionale)	5
Alessandro Bastoni (Internazionale)	5
Marquinhos (PSG)	5
Matheus Nunes (Manchester City)	5
Josip Stanisic (Bayern Munich)	5
Gianluca Mancini (Roma)	4
Nico Schlotterbeck (Borussia Dortmund)	4
Yann Bisseck (Internazionale)	3
Riccardo Calafiori (Arsenal)	3
Joao Cancelo (Barcelona)	3
Marc Cucurella (Chelsea)	3
Patrick Dorgu (Manchester United)	3
Denzel Dumfries (Internazionale)	3
Eric Garcia (Barcelona)	3
Jose Maria Gimenez (Atletico Madrid)	3
Piero Hincapie (Arsenal)	3
Abdukodir Khusanov (Manchester City)	3
Marcos Llorente (Atletico Madrid)	3
Gerard Martin (Barcelona)	3
Eder Militao (Real Madrid)	3
Jan Bednarek (Porto)	2
Matty Cash (Aston Villa)	2
Ruben Dias (Manchester City)	2
Federico Gatti (Juventus)	2
Josko Gvardiol (Manchester City)	2
Dean Huijsen (Real Madrid)	2
Ezri Konsa (Aston Villa)	2
Benjamin Pavard (Marseille)	2
Julian Ryerson (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Matthieu Udol (Lens)	2
Illia Zabarnyi (PSG)	2
Nayef Aguerd (Marseille)	1

Rayan Ait-Nouri (Manchester City)	1
Trent Alexander-Arnold (Real Madrid)	1
Raul Asencio (Real Madrid)	1
Ridle Baku (RB Leipzig)	1
Alejandro Balde (Barcelona)	1
Lilian Brassier (Rennes)	1
Bremer (Juventus)	1
Diego Carlos (Como)	1
Alvaro Carreras (Real Madrid)	1
Zeki Celik (Roma)	1
Diogo Dalot (Manchester United)	1
Sergino Dest (PSV)	1
Ousmane Diomande (Sporting)	1
Wesley Fofana (Chelsea)	1
Matteo Gabbia (Milan)	1
David Hancko (Atletico Madrid)	1
Alex Jimenez (Bournemouth)	1
Ferdi Kadioglu (Brighton)	1
Milos Kerkez (Liverpool)	1
Jakub Kiwior (Porto)	1
Robin Le Normand (Atletico Madrid)	1
Jhon Lucumi (Bologna)	1
Harry Maguire (Manchester United)	1
Adam Marusic (Lazio)	1
Noussair Mazraoui (Manchester United)	1
Moussa Niakhate (Lyon)	1
Marco Palestra (Cagliari)	1
Strahinja Pavlovic (Milan)	1
Marc Pubill (Atletico Madrid)	1
Antonio Rudiger (Real Madrid)	1
Matteo Ruggeri (Atletico Madrid)	1
Marcos Senesi (Bournemouth)	1
Malick Thiaw (Newcastle United)	1
Micky van de Ven (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Ben White (Arsenal)	1
Davide Zappacosta (Atalanta)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Michael Olise (Bayern Munich)	36
Declan Rice (Arsenal)	31
Vitinha (PSG)	27
Joshua Kimmich (Bayern Munich)	16
Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United)	11
Rayan Cherki (Manchester City)	9
Pedri (Barcelona)	9
Federico Valverde (Real Madrid)	8
Jude Bellingham (Real Madrid)	7
Joao Neves (PSG)	7
Lennart Karl (Bayern Munich)	6
Luka Modric (Milan)	6
Martin Zubimendi (Arsenal)	6
Arda Guler (Real Madrid)	5
Fermin Lopez (Barcelona)	5
Phil Foden (Manchester City)	4
Dominik Szoboszlai (Liverpool)	4
Hakan Calhanoglu (Internazionale)	3
Frenkie de Jong (Barcelona)	3
Eberechi Eze (Arsenal)	3
Enzo Fernandez (Chelsea)	3
Jens Petter Hauge (Bodo/Glimt)	3
Scott McTominay (Napoli)	3
Tijjani Reijnders (Manchester City)	3
Morgan Rogers (Aston Villa)	3
Florian Wirtz (Liverpool)	3
Nicolo Barella (Internazionale)	2
Christoph Baumgartner (RB Leipzig)	2

2025-26 TEAM OF THE SEASON

(Based on cumulative votes through the season)

William Saliba
Arsenal
25 *total votes*

Achraf Hakimi
Paris Saint-Germain
18 *total votes*

Michael Olise
Bayern Munich
36 *total votes*

Vitinha
Paris Saint-Germain
27 *total votes*

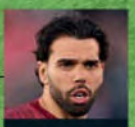
Erling Haaland
Manchester City
26 *total votes*

RAYA

HAKIMI | SALIBA | GABRIEL | MENDES

OLISE | VITINHA | RICE

HAALAND | KANE | MBAPPE



David Raya
Arsenal
32 *total votes*

Gabriel
Arsenal
29 *total votes*

Nuno Mendes
Paris Saint-Germain
21 *total votes*

Declan Rice
Arsenal
31 *total votes*

Kylian Mbappe
Real Madrid
40 *total votes*

Harry Kane
Bayern Munich
64 *total votes*

Ryan Gravenberch (Liverpool)	2
Mikel Merino (Arsenal)	2
Felix Nmecha (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Martin Odegaard (Arsenal)	2
Nico Paz (Como)	2
Bernardo Silva (Manchester City)	2
Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa (Napoli)	2
Pablo Barrios (Atletico Madrid)	1
Marc Bernal (Barcelona)	1
Emiliano Buendia (Aston Villa)	1
Moises Caicedo (Chelsea)	1
Lucas Da Cunha (Como)	1
Kevin De Bruyne (Napoli)	1
Nathan De Cat (Anderlecht)	1
Gavi (Barcelona)	1
Pape Gueye (Villarreal)	1
Myles Lewis-Skelly (Arsenal)	1
Kobbie Mainoo (Manchester United)	1
John McGinn (Aston Villa)	1
Weston McKennie (Juventus)	1

Aleksandar Pavlovic (Bayern Munich)	1
Matteo Politano (Napoli)	1
Richard Rios (Benfica)	1
Alexis Saelemaekers (Milan)	1
Lazar Samardzic (Atalanta)	1
Matias Soule (Roma)	1
Aurelien Tchouameni (Real Madrid)	1
Warren Zaire-Emery (PSG)	1

FORWARDS

Harry Kane (Bayern Munich)	64
Kylian Mbappe (Real Madrid)	40
Erling Haaland (Manchester City)	26
Lamine Yamal (Barcelona)	15
Ousmane Dembele (PSG)	13
Khvicha Kvaratskhelia (PSG)	13
Raphinha (Barcelona)	12
Luis Diaz (Bayern Munich)	10
Vinicius Junior (Real Madrid)	10
Antoine Semenyo (Manchester City)	6

Christian Pulisic (Milan)	5
Deniz Undav (Stuttgart)	5
Donyell Malen (Roma)	4
Lautaro Martinez (Internazionale)	4
Viktor Gyokeres (Arsenal)	3
Bryan Mbeumo (Manchester United)	3
Julian Alvarez (Atletico Madrid)	2
Serge Gnabry (Bayern Munich)	2
Ademola Lookman (Atletico Madrid)	2
David Neres (Napoli)	2
Victor Osimhen (Galatasaray)	2
Joao Pedro (Chelsea)	2
Florian Thauvin (Lens)	2
Marcus Thuram (Internazionale)	2
Ollie Watkins (Aston Villa)	2
Kenan Yildiz (Juventus)	2
Karim Adeyemi (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Maghnes Akliouche (Monaco)	1
Matheus Cunha (Manchester United)	1
Brahim Diaz (Real Madrid)	1

Yan Diomande (RB Leipzig)	1
Jeremy Doku (Manchester City)	1
Desire Doue (PSG)	1
Estevao (Chelsea)	1
Kasper Hogh (Bodo/Glimt)	1
Rasmus Hojlund (Napoli)	1
Robert Lewandowski (Barcelona)	1
Jean-Philippe Mateta (Crystal Palace)	1
Troy Parrott (AZ)	1
Vangelis Pavlidis (Benfica)	1
Marcus Rashford (Barcelona)	1
Ismael Saibari (PSV)	1
Bukayo Saka (Arsenal)	1
Benjamin Sesko (Manchester United)	1
Luis Suarez (Sporting)	1
Crysencio Summerville (West Ham United)	1
Igor Thiago (Brentford)	1
Ferran Torres (Barcelona)	1
Can Uzun (Eintracht Frankfurt)	1

ESM MEMBERS: *A Bola* (Portugal), *Fanatik* (Turkey), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany), *La Gazzetta dello Sport* (Italy), *Kicker* (Germany), *Marca* (Spain), *Nemzeti Sport* (Hungary), *De Telegraaf* (Netherlands), *ELF Voetbal* (Netherlands), *World Soccer* (England)

ESM
EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

King Kane

Bayern Munich striker Harry Kane has won the ESM European Golden Shoe for the second time, finishing as the runaway leader ahead of Manchester City's Erling Haaland and Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe.

The England captain becomes the third player to win the award on two occasions while at Bayern – joining Gerd Muller (1970 and 1972) and Robert Lewandowski (2021 and 2022) – and remains one of only two Englishmen to claim the coveted prize, along with Sunderland's Kevin Phillips back in 1999-2000.

As in former years the award winner is decided on a points basis to even out – as best as possible – domestic competitive imbalance. Goals scored by players competing in Europe's top five leagues – the Premier League, La Liga, Bundesliga, Serie A and Ligue 1 – are worth two points. Goals from those who play in leagues ranked sixth to 22nd in UEFA's coefficient, including the Portuguese Primeira Liga, are worth 1.5 points. Goals scored in leagues below that are worth one point. The official ranking does not include goals scored in play-offs or cup matches.

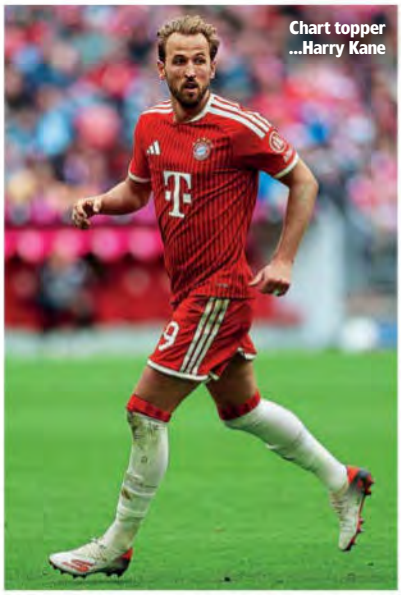


Chart topper ...Harry Kane

Runner-up... Erling Haaland

ESM GOLDEN SHOE 2025-26: FINAL RANKINGS

Pos	Name	Goals	Factor	Pts
1	**Harry Kane** *(Bayern Munich)*	36	2	72
2	**Erling Haaland** *(Manchester City)*	27	2	54
3	**Kylian Mbappe** *(Real Madrid)*	25	2	50
4	**Dion Drena Beljo** *(Dinamo Zagreb)*	31	1.5	46.5
5	**Vedat Muriqi** *(Mallorca)*	23	2	46
6	**Igor Thiago** *(Brentford)*	22	2	44
7=	**Esteban Lepaul** *(Angers/Rennes)*	21	2	42
7=	**Luis Suarez** *(Sporting)*	28	1.5	42
9	**Deniz Undav** *(Stuttgart)*	19	2	38
10	**Ayase Ueda** *(Feyenoord)*	25	1.5	37.5
11	**Donyell Malen** *(Aston Villa/Roma)*	18	2	36
12	**Aleksandar Katai** *(Red Star Belgrade)*	23	1.5	34.5
13=	**Ante Budimir** *(Osasuna)*	17	2	34
13=	**Serhou Guirassy** *(Borussia Dortmund)*	17	2	34
13=	**Lautaro Martinez** *(Internazionale)*	17	2	34
13=	**Antoine Semenyo** *(Bournemouth/Man City)*	17	2	34
17=	**Paul Onuachu** *(Trabzonspor)*	22	1.5	33
17=	**Vangelis Pavlidis** *(Benfica)*	22	1.5	33
17=	**Eldor Shomurodov** *(Istanbul Basaksehir)*	22	1.5	33
20=	**Ferran Torres** *(Barcelona)*	16	2	32
20=	**Mason Greenwood** *(Marseille)*	16	2	32
20=	**Joaquin Panichelli** *(Strasbourg)*	16	2	32
20=	**Patrik Schick** *(Bayer Leverkusen)*	16	2	32
20=	**Vinicius Junior** *(Real Madrid)*	16	2	32
20=	**Ollie Watkins** *(Aston Villa)*	16	2	32
20=	**Lamine Yamal** *(Barcelona)*	16	2	32
27	**Manu Toledano** *(Mons Calpe)*	31	1	31
28=	**Yanis Begraoui** *(Estoril)*	20	1.5	30
28=	**Tomas Bobcek** *(Lechia Gdansk)*	20	1.5	30
28=	**Luis Diaz** *(Bayern Munich)*	15	2	30
28=	**Morgan Gibbs-White** *(Nottingham Forest)*	15	2	30
28=	**Michael Olise** *(Bayern Munich)*	15	2	30
28=	**Mikel Oyarzabal** *(Real Sociedad)*	15	2	30
28=	**Joao Pedro** *(Chelsea)*	15	2	30
35	**Darko Lemajic** *(RFS)*	29	1	29
36=	**Karol Czubak** *(Motor Lublin)*	19	1.5	28.5
36=	**Talisca** *(Fenerbahce)*	19	1.5	28.5
38=	**Dominic Calvert-Lewin** *(Leeds United)*	14	2	28
38=	**Anastasios Douvikas** *(Como)*	14	2	28
38=	**Viktor Gyokeres** *(Arsenal)*	14	2	28
38=	**Borja Iglesias** *(Celta Vigo)*	14	2	28
38=	**Andrej Kramaric** *(Hoffenheim)*	14	2	28
38=	**Robert Lewandowski** *(Barcelona)*	14	2	28
38=	**Toni Martinez** *(Alaves)*	14	2	28
38=	**Georges Mikautadze** *(Lyon/Villarreal)*	14	2	28
46=	**Ibrahim Diabate** *(GAIS)*	18	1.5	27
46=	**Luka Juricic** *(Borac Banja Luka)*	27	1	27
46=	**Daniel Karlsbakk** *(Sarpsborg)*	18	1.5	27
46=	**August Priske** *(Djurgardens)*	18	1.5	27
46=	**Jesus Ramirez** *(Nacional)*	18	1.5	27

Ligue 1 top goalscorer... Esteban Lepaul

Top Eredivisie marksman... Ayase Ueda

The Golden Shoe is administered, computed and formulated by the European Sports Media group

WorldSoccer

NEXT MONTH

THE COMPLETE RECORD

2026 World Cup

- THE FULL STORY WITH STUNNING IMAGES
- EVERY GAME REVIEWED, EVERY TEAM ANALYSED
- TEAM OF THE TOURNAMENT AND FULL WC SQUAD LISTS

ON SALE JULY 31

Milan

Italian giants clear out their entire senior management after a disastrous end to the season in Serie A

Milan face a summer of major upheaval in the wake of their failure to qualify for next season's Champions League.

The Serie A club's entire senior management team, including head coach Massimiliano Allegri, is being replaced in response to a season which its American owners called "an unequivocal failure".

Missing out on the Champions League again is likely to lead to an exodus of playing talent as well, with Portugal superstar – and 2021-22 Serie A MVP – Rafael Leao already hinting at a potential departure after seven years at the club.

Allegri's dismissal came less than 24 hours after his team suffered a shock 2-1 defeat to Cagliari at the San Siro on the last day of the season. The loss was their sixth in their final ten games, an astonishing collapse in form which cost them a place in the top four and left them having to settle for Europa League football next season.

The head coach, however, was not the only one to pay the price.

RedBird Capital Partners, the US investment firm that owns the club, also announced the departure of chief executive Giorgio Furlani, sporting director Igli Tare and technical director Geoffrey Moncada.

Disastrous season... Milan players react to their final-day defeat to Cagliari

"The final stretch was completely inconsistent with the performance up to that point," the owners said in a statement, adding that the Cagliari result had rendered the campaign "an unequivocal failure".

"It is now time for change and a comprehensive reorganisation of football operations," they added.

RedBird managing partner Gerry Cardinale is working closely with Zlatan Ibrahimovic, the former Milan striker and special advisor to the company, to fill the vacancies, prioritising that of the head coach, with ex-Sporting and Manchester United boss Ruben Amorim putting pen to paper on a two-year contract in June.

Sacked...ex-coach Massimiliano Allegri

Uncertain future ...Rafael Leao

Swiftly identified as the man to succeed Allegri, Amorim, according to Cardinale, brings "a modern footballing identity defined by dominating games in possession, a modern pressing system and a clear tactical approach."

The appointment of the 41-year-old Portuguese manager comes just five months after his dismissal at Old Trafford and, intriguingly, one of his first games in charge will be against his old club, when Milan take on the Red Devils in a pre-season friendly in Wroclaw, Poland on August 15.

Another season without Champions League football means the *Rossoneri* will miss out on up to €90 million in revenue. RedBird paid €1.2 billion to buy the club in 2022 and since then have invested more than €500m in the team. Yet the only trophy to show for it so far has been an Italian Super Cup.

Allegri is the fourth head coach to have parted company with Milan since the owners took control. Stefano Pioli left two years ago after finishing a distant second to Internazionale in the title race. Paulo Fonseca and Sergio Conceicao both came and went in 2024-25 as the club endured an underwhelming campaign, finishing eighth and failing to qualify for Europe for the first time in almost a decade.

When RedBird identified Allegri, a six-time *Scudetto* winner, as the man to lead Milan back into the Champions League and challenge for the top spots, the owners' faith appeared to be well founded. Free from the distraction of European football, he oversaw a 24-match unbeaten league run that kept his team on course for a top-four finish. For four months of the season, they sat second behind rivals Inter.

When they completed the double over the leaders with a 1-0 victory in March, Milan closed the gap to seven points and moved nine clear of Como, who were then sitting just outside the Champions League places. That was when things began to go wrong. With just three wins in their final ten games, Milan's form in the run-in matched that of relegation-bound Cremonese.

The goals dried up and the defensive solidity that had served them so well deserted them. Too many key players suffered a drop-off in form at a critical time. United States talisman Christian Pulisic and Leao were both left out of Allegri's final starting XI in the game against Cagliari. The Portugal winger could not hide his disappointment over the way the season ended.

"It was a season that tested my physical and psychological state to the maximum," he posted on Instagram. "Only those who experienced it closely with me know how difficult it was...may Milan triumph again next season."

Despite having two years left on his contract, Leao's future is uncertain.

"I think I've already given everything I have in Milan," he told Portugal's *Sport TV*. "Everyone has dreams, ambitions, challenges to face. I aspire to have a new challenge in a new league."

Whether the appointment of his fellow countryman Amorim changes that outlook remains to be seen. The new coach is renowned for his devotion to a 3-4-2-1 formation, and, if Leao is earmarked for one of the No.10 roles behind the striker, his Milan career could yet be revitalised.

While Leao's future remains in the balance and Pulisic looks likely to stay, questions remain over the futures of several other players, including Mexico No.9 Santiago Gimenez and English duo Ruben Loftus-Cheek and Fikayo Tomori, while Croatia icon Luka Modric, whose contract has a further one-year option, will decide once the World Cup is over.

Greg Whelan

> "It is now time for change and a comprehensive reorganisation of football operations"
> **Milan's owners RedBird after clearing out the club's management**

The man to turn things around... Ruben Amorim

eye witness

Liam Miller reports

ITALY

The king's club

Based in the foothills of Vesuvius and owned by the grandson of Italy's last king, Savoia 1908 are steeped in history. Now, the club are on the rise

The first train line in Italy was opened in 1839, a nine-kilometre stretch from the city of Naples along the coast to Portici, one of its outer municipalities. Three years later, it was extended to Torre Annunziata at the foot of Mount Vesuvius.

Now one of Naples' larger municipalities, Torre Annunziata is a town surrounded by history. A stone's throw from the archaeological sites of Pompeii and Oplontis, it was here in September 1860 that Italian revolutionary general Giuseppe Garibaldi and his band of Redshirts passed through on their way to Naples. They arrived unopposed, welcomed into the city by banners bearing the red cross of the ascendant Kingdom of Savoy, to complete the unification of Italy – or the *Risorgimento* (Resurgence).

A short walk from the station, that same flag can still be seen today –

The king's club ...Savoia 1908
Photo credit: Alex Tione

four of them, in fact: one in each corner of the Stadio Alfredo Giraud, home of Savoia 1908.

It is a ground with an almost surreal backdrop, loomed over by the most famous volcano in the world. It's so close that on a clear day with a breeze, one can make out the vegetation swaying towards the crater. In the opposite direction, the Bay of Naples, immortalised by Homer's *Odyssey*, offers an alternative horizon. The stadium's weather-beaten exterior is a fitting aesthetic for an institution centred in what feels like the cradle of endless myths and legends.

Nobody is quite sure when or why the badge was adopted, but it is all wrapped up in the complicated history not only of the club but Italy as a whole.

"The badge we wear is the same badge I've seen associated with two World Cup-winning Italy teams," Arcangelo Sessa, the club president, tells *World Soccer* after his team's 3-0 win against Sicilian side Igea Virtus in their penultimate home game of the season. He is referring to Italy's back-to-back World Cup successes of the 1930s, when the *tricolore* still featured the Italian royal family's coat of arms in its centre. "It [the badge] carries a great responsibility," he adds.

The badge was removed from the Italian flag in the aftermath of the Second World War. Having initially been a symbol of the unified Kingdom of Italy, the House of Savoy became associated with enabling the rise of fascism. In 1946, the monarchy was abolished by referendum and Umberto II, the last king of Italy, was sent into exile in Portugal.

In November 2022, 79 years after his grandfather vacated the throne, and 20 years after the official exile of royal family members was lifted, Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy, Prince of Venice, completed the acquisition of the football club bearing his name and family coat of arms: Savoia 1908.

In practical terms, and in the eyes of most supporters, the connection to the grandson of Italy's last monarch and the subsequent association to the House of Savoy is a trivial one. His status in Italian public life is that of a middling celebrity, and his involvement in the club is ostensibly ambassadorial. But his takeover came at just the right time, when the club needed it most.

"This ownership group took over the club when there was truly nothing, nothing at all," Sessa explains. "We stepped in mid-season and, with great sacrifice, managed to save it."

In the stark reality of the Italian lower tiers, it's one thing to stave off the existential dread of

Title party...Savoia players and supporters celebrate promotion *Photo credit: Alex Tione*

bureaucracy and financial mismanagement, but it's another thing entirely to arrive into a club with a clearly-defined plan for progression. But that's what Sessa and his colleagues did. "The project was to bring the club to Serie B within five years," he says.

Getting to Serie C is hard enough. Serie D, the Italian fourth tier, comprises 160 clubs, with eight separate regional leagues of 20 teams. To progress to the third division you either need to win your league or negotiate a complicated play-off system.

Yet that victory over Igea Virtus propelled the team to the top of their Serie D league and within touching distance of their first promotion in 12 years, keeping Sessa's objective within reach.

It is the latest twist in a long, bumpy ride for the 118-year-old club.

Savoia was founded in 1908 by the Voiello family, who had made their fortune as one of the country's leading pasta producers. Sandwiched perfectly between Vesuvius and the Bay of Naples, the combination of the mineral-rich earth and the sea breeze made Torre Annunziata the perfect location for the family's first pasta factory. After becoming established, the Voiellos decided to give something back to the community, and Unione Sportiva Savoia was born.

In honour of the club's origins, the founders chose to don the players in white jerseys, inspired by the most important ingredient in the pasta production process: flour.

By the early 1920s, Savoia were established as one of southern Italy's leading clubs, winning three regional championships in a row, with their high-water mark coming in a two-legged play-off final in 1924.

Before the foundation of Serie A, and in an increasingly divided Italy, the national competition was split into two leagues: North and Central-South. Each year, the winners of the Central-Southern league would take on the Northern champions in a national final. As reigning Central-Southern champions, Savoia faced a Genoa side looking to win their ninth title. Savoia lost 4-2 on aggregate, but their 1-1 draw in the home leg became the first time in Italian history that a team from the North had failed to beat a team from the South in the national final. After the match, Savoia gave packs of Voiello pasta to the Genoa players.

Along Rampa Nunziata, a short winding road that connects the town to the seafront, a plaque commemorates the scale of the achievement. It describes Savoia as the "flag-bearer of the South," before signing off stirringly: "*Il Nord Tremò*" – the North trembled.

It is, admittedly, a flattering interpretation of a final that Savoia lost, but a reminder nonetheless of the club's past and the underdog spirit that exits in southern Italy.

The following decades were tumultuous. After the House of Savoy's exile, the club changed its name and badge, and later slid into bankruptcy. While their competitors professionalised, Savoia slipped into obscurity.

"There's beauty in rising and falling," reflects Andrea Vecchione, a native of Torrese, who started working for the club as physiotherapist during this period. "I'm 90 now, so I've been coming to this stadium for about 70 years," he adds.

Now known respectfully around the club as Don Andrea, his favourite moment came in the 1998-99 season: "The victory that got us into Serie B – that was wonderful.

"It was a glorious squad. We achieved it in Avellino, in that play-off against Juve Stabia. It was wonderful."

That victory secured Savoia's long-awaited return to Serie B after over half a century, and to have done so against their local rivals – Stabia is located 25 minutes down the coast on that famous train line – crowned it as a defining moment in the club's modern history.

Twenty-seven years later, they have achieved another one.

"*Bottazzo vive con noi!*" – Bottazzo lives with us! – was the rallying cry at the end of the victory over Igea Virtus. Players, staff, management, friends and family stood in unison in front of a 3,000-strong *curva*. At the centre of the huddle was the family of Salvatore Bottazzo, a 20-year-old member of Savoia's most passionate ultras group, who had suddenly passed away two days earlier. Each chilling roar echoed against the foothills of Vesuvius, revealed only by the deafening silence between chants.

"His presence was still felt," Sessa said after the game. "His parents, who are Savoia fans, knew how much their son cared about the jersey. This victory is for them."

Almost 8,000 fans attended that game, the largest attendance since the club was in Serie B.

Savoia's 3-1 victory away to Athletic Palermo the following week made the calculations for the final day very simple: a single point would confirm their return to Serie C – the professional ranks of Italian football – after an 11-year absence.

In the days leading up to the final push, a home game against relegated Sancataldese, the club could barely contain the frenzied demand for tickets. By 4pm on that Sunday afternoon, spurred on by an early Dani Munoz opener, those without tickets began congregating on scooters around the entrance to the Stadio Alfredo Giraud.

The 3-0 victory allowed for a drawn-out festival of celebration. Inside the stadium, the players and management, as well as Don Andrea and president Sessa, embraced and sang joyously with the *curva*. Outside the stadium, in the town, hundreds of scooters, each carrying two or three, sometimes four or five people, packed the main road of Corso Umberto I. Thousands more with flares, flags and horns joined them, celebrating long into the late-spring night, revelling in a resurgent Savoia.

"Savoia represents unity and togetherness," explained 21-year-old Mattia earnestly, eager not to be kept from the celebrations for too long. "There's a genuine feeling for the team, first for the players, then for what it represents. It's an outlet for the whole town. We're dreaming of rising again," he smiled, before turning and disappearing into the crowd.

> "Savoia represents unity and togetherness …we're dreaming of rising again"
>
> **A Savoia fan following the club's promotion to Serie C**

Iconic backdrop ...Savoia 1908 is overlooked by Mount Vesuvius *Photo credit: Alex Tione*

***Curva*...Savoia supporters inside the Stadio Alfredo Giraud** *Photo credit: Alex Tione*

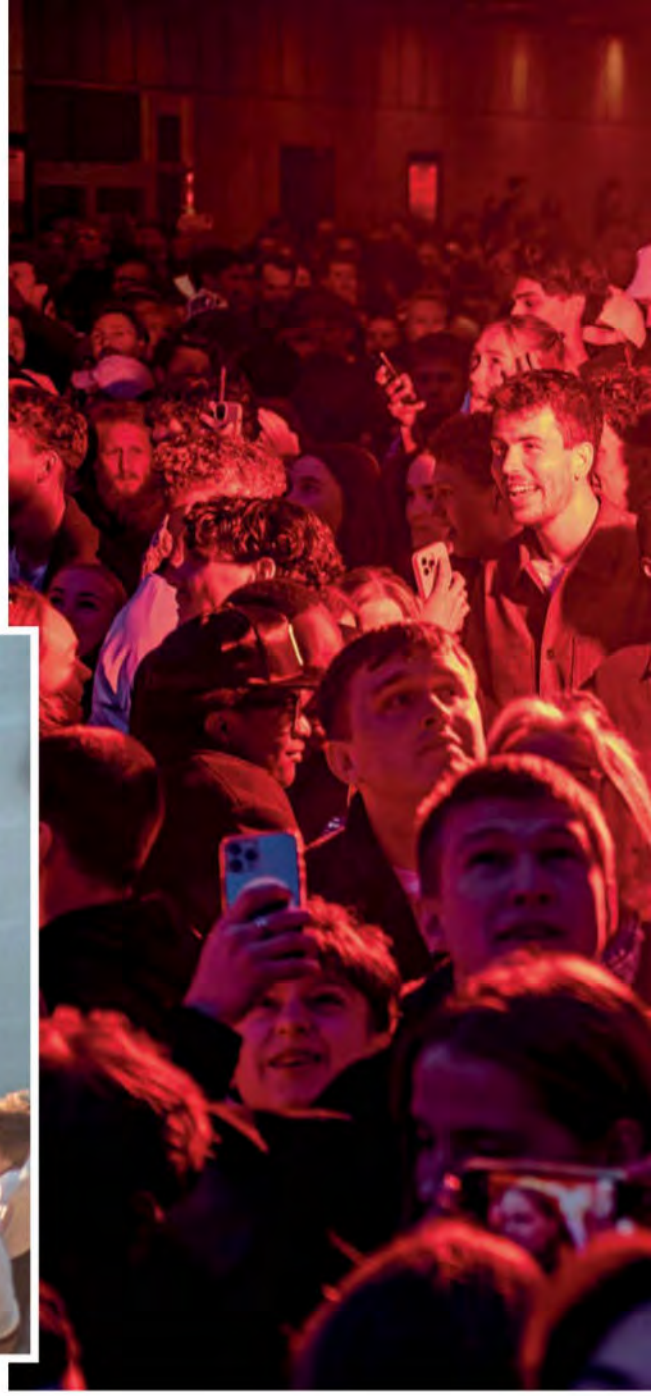
eye witness

Max Heermann reports

DENMARK

AGF's historic title win

The big screen...fans wait for the game to be broadcast live in Aarhus *Photo credit: Ana Navarro Bullo*



Flare...an AGF supporter lights up a street in Aarhus *Photo credit: Til Burger*

The sun sets over the big TV screen at the watch party in Aarhus on a warm spring day. It's May 10, a few minutes after 6pm, and excitement is in the air among thousands of spectators in Denmark's second biggest city. The city's top-flight football team, AGF (Aarhus Gymnastikforening), are playing in Copenhagen, some 190km away, against Brondby. With the scoreboard showing a 2-0 lead for the visitors and just a few minutes left to play, they are within touching distance of not only an impressive away win but AGF's first Danish title triumph in 40 years.

As the game ends, the whole of Aarhus erupts. Plastic cups fly through the air, beer rains down on the crowd, parents embrace their children and friends stare at one another in disbelief. All the anticipation and excitement of the past weeks make way for the slow, beautiful realisation that it has actually happened.

It was a fitting opponent to seal it against. Brondby, as well as their fellow capital city club FC Copenhagen, represent modern Danish football. When AGF won their last title in 1986, Brondby were relative minnows having won their first league crown a year earlier. But they were on their way to becoming the most dominant team in Denmark, with four more championships in the following five years.

Then, in 1992, FC Copenhagen were founded after the merging of two of the city's clubs, KB and B1903. The goal was to establish a big-city team that could become a successful brand for Danish football, and by the 2000s they had replaced Brondby as Denmark's dominant force.

Their blueprint – privately owned, well-run, with an extensive scouting network and a productive academy – has come to represent Danish football. But AGF are a throwback to a different era.

Founded as an athletics club in 1880, with the football section added in 1902, AGF is one of the oldest clubs in Denmark. They've won six league titles and nine Danish Cups, enjoying particularly successful periods in the 1950s and 1980s.

Despite some stagnation since then, they have always remained a source of pride and identity for their city.

Watch party...AGF supporters gather to watch their team on the big screen *Photo credit: Ana Navarro Bullo*

Years of hurt...AGF hadn't won the title since 1986 *Photo credit: Ana Navarro Bullo*

Although they have some private investment, the club is still largely owned by its members, many of whom are now partying in the streets; this success, literally, belongs to them too.

Many of them weren't born when AGF won the title in 1986, the year of Maradona's triumph in Mexico, and apart from the historic parallels with another World Cup taking place in Mexico 40 years on, few things were in AGF's favour to win the title this time.

The beginning of the 2025-26 season was difficult for AGF. One win and two losses from their first three games seemed to verify the grim expectations many supporters had, having ended the previous season with seven defeats in a row.

German coach Uwe Rosler was sacked as a result of that collapse in form, and in came former player Jakob Poulsen. The team remained largely unchanged, leading many Aarhusians to expect no major upward trend. The chances of upsetting Brondby, Copenhagen or FC Midtjylland, who had won the last 11 titles between them, seemed remote.

A trip to the capital to face Copenhagen on the fourth matchday hardly seemed like an opportunity to lift the mood. Instead, AGF produced one of the performances of the season, winning 3-2 at the Parken Stadium.

It proved a turning point for both clubs, setting Aarhus on course for a fairy-tale season and Copenhagen for a historically difficult one (more on page 45).

By April, both of the Copenhagen giants were out of the picture, leaving the title race between Midtjylland and AGF, two clubs from the same region of Jutland. Midtjylland were formed in 1999 through the fusion of Ikast FS and Herning Fremad and between 2014 and 2023, under the stewardship of Brentford owner Matthew Benham, they won four league titles with a team built upon the Englishman's model of data-driven recruitment.

It was a race between two diametrically opposed teams: a modern, successful team stacked with young, exciting players from all over the world, versus AGF, a historic club almost 100 years older than Midtjylland with a squad of mostly Scandinavian players and no stars.

They met twice in the space of a week at the end of April. AGF dominated the first game and took an early lead, but conceded an own goal seven minutes from time and then a last-minute sucker-punch to lose 2-1.

With the momentum swinging back towards the chasers, closing the gap at the top of the table to just two points, this might have been a result to decide the title race.

Indeed, just a few days later, Midtjylland moved into top spot thanks to a midweek win over Sonderjyske while AGF could only draw with Nordsjaelland. When the top two met again at the end of the week, a 0-0 draw meant they were level on 58 points with three games to play.

Travelling fans... AGF supporters at the Brondby Stadium

> The club is still largely owned by its members, many of whom are now partying in the streets; this success, literally, belongs to them too

Danish champions...AGF players pose for a team photo in front of their fans after claiming the title

But this AGF side had spent the season refusing to give up. Led by experienced players like 36-year-old striker Patrick Mortensen and goalkeeper Jesper Hansen (41), they bounced back and didn't lose faith, while Midtjylland buckled. Two draws for their rivals presented AGF with the chance to clinch the title with a trip to Brondby on the penultimate match day, and goals from Henrik Dalsgaard and Kevin Yakob secured the trophy.

As night falls over the city, there is no sign of the party ending. The players would get their chance to lift the trophy on the pitch a week later, with a 6-2 home win over Viborg on the final day of the season, but this is all about an outbreak of pure joy. Streets are filled, flags waving above the crowds, and everywhere the same song can be heard: *Malaga* by Danish singer Thomas Helmig, a local and national icon. The message of the club's anthem is simple: wherever you go in the world (for example, Malaga), you will always come back home to Aarhus. On a night like this, this connection between the city, its people, and the football club becomes evident.

At a time when football clubs have become global brands, and success seems limited to those with the biggest budgets or the swiftest scouting, AGF's title will not reverse football's economic realities. Yet, for one season, a club that remained deeply tied to its city and its members proved that success does not always belong to the richest or most ambitious project. As *Malaga* echoes through the streets long into the night, the city of Aarhus celebrates a championship that finally came home.

Key player...veteran AGF striker Patrick Mortensen celebrates with an emotional fan

Street parties...AGF fans gather in the streets to celebrate their team's title win
Photo credit: Til Burger

eyewitness

Mark Gleeson reports

SWITZERLAND

From the bottom to the top

How newly promoted FC Thun became shock champions of Switzerland

The spring sunshine had families out in their droves, browsing through the pop-up market alongside the Aare River or sitting outside the many cafes and restaurants on the Mullerplatz.

The streets should have been packed with FC Thun supporters waiting to make their way south-west and onto the Stockhorn Arena, but, after the news that their clash with FC Basel had been postponed, only a handful of the club's red shirts could be seen milling around.

It was the first of several false starts for a club who were on the cusp of a first-ever league title, just one season after winning promotion, drawing comparisons with Leicester City's shock Premier League success in 2015-16 or, even more pertinently, Kaiserslautern's Bundesliga crown in 1997-98 straight after coming up from the second tier of German football.

Thun had been on the verge of completing their fairy-tale season in a decisive home clash against reigning champions Basel, but they were forced to wait. A fire in the visitors' clubhouse the previous night had destroyed much of their equipment, leaving them unable to take part in the fixture.

The 10,000-capacity stadium had been sold out in anticipation of Thun's coronation but in the end their supporters had to wait several more weeks before being mathematically sure and able to celebrate.

Thun, based close to the heart of Switzerland, finished the Super League

campaign five points clear of St Gallen, having at one stage enjoyed a 14-point advantage. It was a jittery end – they didn't win any of their final five games – but that did little to take away from their heroics.

They had set themselves a lofty goal before the season began but winning a first title in the club's 128-year history was not one of them.

"As a newly promoted team, we wanted to finish in the top six," says head coach Mauro Lustrinelli, the mastermind behind the remarkable success, whose efforts have seen him snapped up by Union Berlin for the 2026-27 Bundesliga season.

Over the years, the club had suffered repeated financial woes, including a spell as part of a multi-club ownership group backed by American and Chinese investors before becoming locally owned again.

It had taken five years to get out of the second division, and few, if any, had seen them as top-six candidates.

But after four matches they found themselves at the top of the table – and then stayed there for the entire season.

"This season is wonderful, fantastic and historic," adds the 50-year-old Lustrinelli, who had been coaching the team since 2022.

"By the time we reached the Super League, a lot was already in place: the playing system, a large part of the squad. We were often flowing along perfectly, and you had the impression that everything was just working perfectly.

"But anyone who plays football knows that's just the beginning. Keeping that flow is much harder. We worked a lot on the mental aspect."

Vice-captain Leonardo Bertone, who contributed 11 goals during the season, was quick to praise the head coach. "What distinguishes Lustrinelli is that he had a clear game plan," explains Bertone. "He wanted to implement it every day, in every match, in every training session, and consistently. That's why we never let up; he demanded a lot of energy and power."

After a playing career that included 51 goals in 112 appearances across two spells at Thun, Lustrinelli served as a youth coach, assistant manager and, on two occasions, caretaker manager, so he was already well woven into the fabric of the club when he took the reins in July 2022.

He also played a big part in Thun's greatest achievement prior to this title. A former striker, he contributed 20 league goals in the 2004-05 season as the team finished second and then scored three more in UEFA Champions League qualifiers to secure a spot in the group stage alongside Arsenal, Ajax and Sparta Prague.

Another member of that team, Andres Gerber, has been part of the club for more than 20 years – first as a player, then a coach, then a sporting director and now, since 2020, club president.

When he approached his old team-mate in 2022, tearing his hair out with the club on the brink of collapse in the second division and looking for a saviour, Lustrinelli did not hesitate.

Then managing Switzerland's Under-21 side, Lustrinelli had a plan: no expensive transfers, no quick fixes. "We had brought in many players on loan, and there was no team spirit," Gerber says.

"That is why we chose to build the core around players who belong at Thun and believe in us. We wanted to promote local footballers."

A close-knit group was forged in the second division, despite failing in the play-offs in both 2020-21 and 2023-24. Then came "the enormous relief" of promotion at the end of the 2024-25 season, where they secured the Challenge League title with four rounds of fixtures still to be played.

Rather than bring in a raft of new signings, Lustrinelli opted to keep intact the core of the team that won promotion.

"We didn't get many new players in the summer," adds captain Marco Burki, "but during pre-season, in the friendly matches against first division teams, we felt that we weren't really lagging behind. We could match their level."

And so began the run with victory in each of their opening four games and then a six-match winning streak in October and November, adding to the momentum.

"During the first half of the season, we were sometimes laughing: 'How good is this?' We would joke among ourselves," adds Burki. "We were also surprised because the big clubs weren't performing at their level."

They certainly weren't. Basel, inspired to last season's title by the returning Xherdan Shaqiri, were miles off the pace, finishing in fifth spot. So too were Young Boys, title winners in six of the previous eight years, who finished a place lower in sixth. By the winter break, the two former champions were eight and 11 points behind the leaders respectively.

Yet it was after the league resumed, when Thun put together a run of eight successive victories, that the skipper says the realisation of a possible title hit home. "The chemistry between the players was key."

In mid-April, they were all geared up to secure the title against 21-time champions Basel, but it took another three weeks – and two postponed parties in the stadium – before it was finally done.

The star performers included 32-year-old Bertone, who was named the league's Golden Player, with bulking North Macedonia centre-forward Elmin Rastoder joining him in the league's Team of the Season. Ethan Meichtry, a 21-year-old midfielder, appears to be the most valuable asset with a host of top-flight clubs in Germany and Italy reportedly said to be circling.

Lustrinelli, at the beginning of the season, said he preferred to take the stairs rather than the elevator to the top. "What I meant was there are players and coaches who take the elevator straight to the top. But they might not enjoy the same view as those who take the stairs," the departing coach explains. "Even though we became champions as a newly promoted team, we took it step by step. By the time we reached the Super League, a lot was already in place: the playing system and a large part of the squad."

He will not be around for the upcoming Champions League campaign where Thun will go into the second qualifying round, but left them with this advice.

"It's important to have the vision of finishing in the top six. Thun should maintain this ambition and courage. With this structure, the good people here, and the continuity, we've had a fantastic journey and brought the club to a high level," says Lustrinelli.

"Our story proves that there are no impossible things in football," adds Gerber. "Never say never."

> "We chose to build the core around players who belong at Thun and believe in us. We wanted to promote local footballers"
>
> **FC Thun club president Andreas Gerber**

Club legend... Mauro Lustrinelli will leave Thun this summer

eye witness

Luke Entwistle reports

FRANCE

'A ship without a sail'

How Nice's season descended into angry protests, empty stadiums and, in the end, outright apathy

It was a monumental match for Nice captain Dante, who, at 42 years old, took to the pitch for the final time as a professional player. As kick-off approached, he ran towards the south stand, ordinarily inhabited by the ultras, and let out an enormous scream. This is part of a pre-game ritual that, enacted for the final time, had never been heard quite like this, as it reverberated around the 36,000-capacity Allianz Riviera. That's because, as Nice prepared to take their shot at staying in Ligue 1, their stadium was empty.

The club's supporters were banned from attending the second leg of their relegation play-off against second-tier Saint-Etienne. Not only that, but in what was a high-security operation, riot police ensured that anyone "acting like an OGC Nice supporter" was also prohibited from the stadium's surrounding area, on orders of the local authorities. It didn't prevent the local padel courts from welcoming customers, the only sign of life on the approach to the stadium ahead of the match, the sound of racket on ball replacing the usual pre-match buzz. As the club fought to avoid relegation to Ligue 2 for the first time since 1997, the atmosphere was one of enforced serenity.

It was quite the contrast to two weeks prior when Nice's fans stormed the pitch, inciting the authorities' stadium ban. That night, on Metz's visit to the Allianz Riviera, tension was in the air.

It was the final fixture of the regular season, and Nice's fate wasn't in their hands as they began the day in 16th, the relegation play-off spot. "Get your arses into gear," chanted the home fans; they weren't heard.

Mixed in with the tension, though, was understandable optimism. Five days later, Nice would be heading to face Lens in the final of the French Cup. "Everyone to Paris," read a banner unfurled pre-match.

The context of this final-day shootout was also favourable. In front of Nice stood a Metz side already relegated and managed by Benoit Tavenot, who, across his stints at Bastia and *Les Grenats*, had failed to win a single game all season. Elsewhere, both of the teams they had a chance of leapfrogging, Auxerre and Le Havre, had tricky away fixtures.

But as Nice floundered, anger rose. At half-time, with the game goalless, the players were booed off. When they emerged for the second half, the ultras had descended from their usual position

Pitch invasion...riot police clear Nice supporters off the pitch following their 0-0 draw with Metz

in the second tier into the bottom tier – and you could be sure that it wasn't to get a better view.

Despondency crept in. Meanwhile, at the other end of the country, Auxerre took the lead against Champions League hopefuls Lille, and Le Havre did the same at Lorient. In Nice, it would end goalless, their fate confirmed.

A team that began the season back in August with a Champions League qualifier against Benfica would end the campaign needing to beat a Ligue 2 side to ensure their place in the top flight for next season.

The full-time whistle prompted the hundreds of ultras, now situated at pitch level, to storm the pitch and attempt to make their way to the tunnel, down which both sets of players quickly retreated. Repelled by riot police, they failed but would be left to wreak havoc on the pitch, damaging hoardings, the turf itself and the netting, before further clashes outside the stadium. For players, staff and journalists – including *World Soccer*'s correspondent – the situation necessitated a lock-in. It was only after midnight that the situation came under control and the crowds dispersed.

The target of the fans' ire was the players; supporters had already secured the crowd-pleasing appointments to hierarchical positions after another violent episode back in November. Former presidents Jean-Pierre Rivere and Maurice Cohen came in as co-presidents and, soon after, they brought back former manager Claude Puel, who presided over one of the most successful eras in the club's history in the 2010s. Past successes have spared them from the anger.

Their arrivals presuppose departures, and there were plenty after that attack on the team bus back in November. Following a loss away to Lorient, fans gathered to "welcome" the delegation outside the club's training ground late at night. For the occasion, fans wore balaclavas and brought metal petanque balls, according to then-manager Franck Haise. "Did they bring them to play petanque?" he asked.

Forwards Terem Moffi and Jeremie Boga were targeted, although many other players and staff, including sporting director Florian Maurice, were subjected to hits and spits. "The days that followed [the attack] were very hard," said Maurice, but he remained until the end of the season. Moffi and Boga, however, were put on sick leave. They wouldn't play again before leaving on loan for Porto and Juventus, respectively, in January. President Fabrice Bocquet was not present as the bus rolled into the training ground, but he left soon after. Later in December, Haise would follow.

Before leaving, the head coach had complained about his inability to "create a group" from the disjointed squad constructed for him over the summer. INEOS' purchase of a minority stake in Manchester United saw Nice's squad constructed on a shoestring budget. But surprisingly, despite arriving in 2019 with ambitions of challenging Paris Saint-Germain for the Ligue 1 title, the owners haven't copped the fans' wrath for the club's descent into chaos.

Further uncertainty lies ahead. The whole project needs to be ripped up. A new head coach, ex-Lorient boss Olivier Pantaloni, has already been hired. Also on the to-do list: a squad overhaul, a new president, a new sporting director and new owners, although an offer from an American buyer fell through in June.

For too long, Nice have been a ship without a sail; a new captain is needed to correct their course.

If INEOS do exit, they will at least leave the club in Ligue 1 – a 4-1 win over Saint-Etienne (the first leg finished goalless) ensured as much. There was no new addition to the trophy cabinet though, after a 3-1 defeat to Lens in the cup final.

"Catastrophic" was the word that Rivere used to describe Nice's season as his interim period at the club came to an end. No reason to celebrate, therefore, and so it stood to reason that, on the way out of the stadium after the play-off, the streets were empty. From anger to ambivalence in the space of a fortnight: which is worse?

2025-26 SEASON REVIEW

Albania	P46
Armenia	P47
Austria	P43
Azerbaijan	P43
Belgium	P47
Bosnia & Herzegovina	P47
Bulgaria	P42
Croatia	P47
Cyprus	P47
Czech Republic	P47
Denmark	P45
England	P58
France	P44 & P64
Germany	P45 & P66
Gibraltar	P46
Greece	P47
Hungary	P42
Israel	P47
Italy	P62
Luxembourg	P46
Netherlands	P70
Northern Ireland	P47
Poland	P41 & P47
Portugal	P44 & P68
Romania	P46
Russia	P47
Scotland	P72
Serbia	P46
Slovakia	P46
Spain	P60
Turkey	P45 & P46
Ukraine	P43
Wales	P46

PLUS

Rest of the world	P48
UEFA Champions League	P52
Europa League	P54
Conference League	P56
Tables	P90

PODOLSKI SIGNS OFF AND MOVES UPSTAIRS

It is an ending to a playing career so perfect it feels as though he must have written it himself. Lukas Podolski, the former Germany, Bayern Munich and Arsenal forward, signed off as a professional player by helping his boyhood club win their first trophy in 38 years, and a day later became owner of the team.

Podolski has spent the last five years at Gornik Zabrze, who won the Polish Cup for the first time in 54 years by beating Rakow Czestochowa 2-0 in the final in May. Podolski, who turned 41 in June, only came on as a sub in the 90th minute, yet it was a moment that would rank alongside any of his career achievements.

Born in Gliwice, Zabrze's neighbouring city, Lukas moved to Germany with his parents at just two years old. His father Waldemar was a player himself, but like many families from that region opted to leave communist Poland for better living conditions.

But Lukas never forgot his roots, even promising his grandmother, who passed away last year, that he would play for Gornik at the end of his career. In 2021, he fulfilled that promise.

As the only Polish club to have reached a European final, losing the 1970 Cup Winners' Cup to Manchester City 2-1, Gornik are one of the country's historic powers. They have been league champions of Poland on 14 occasions, a tally bettered only by Legia Warsaw, but the last of those came in 1988.

During the communist era, the club enjoyed enormous support from the mining sector (*gornik* literally means miner in English), but since the end of communism and the decline of the mining industry they have slipped down the league.

In recent years, Gornik has been in a state of perpetual uncertainty. When the Zabrze city board announced they wanted to sell the club, Podolski began to be named as a potential buyer in media speculation. He had already announced that this season would be his last and, within days of lifting the cup, he paid a reported 4 million zloty (just over £800,000) for an 86% stake in the club, committing to a further £2.5m over the next three years.

It may prove to be a shrewd investment. The club's history means they have retained a strong fanbase, even through the baron years; around three quarters of the 50,000 crowd at the Warsaw stadium were from Zabrze.

"This cup is mainly for them. They've been waiting for it for so long," said head coach Michal Gasparik, a former player who has enjoyed impressive results in his first season.

Gasparik also admitted that seeing one of his players become his boss in a matter of days was unusual.

"Yes, it was a very specific and strange situation, one that you almost never encounter as a coach," he said. "The most important [thing] was that he wanted the best for the club and didn't just look out for himself."

Podolski's final game came a few weeks later, coming on for the last 20 minutes of a 6-2 win at home to Radomiak on the final day of the season. The win sealed second place in the Ekstraklasa, Gornik's best league position since 1991.

Of his plans for the club, he declared: "There will be no revolution, just a quiet build-up."

Alongside his football career, Podolski also has business experience having invested in a chain of kebab shops. This though, will be a whole new challenge, particularly amidst supporters' rising expectations.

Yet for a man who has already written the perfect script for the end of his playing career, the sequel could be just as exciting.

Dariusz Kurowski

Signing off...Lukas Podolski celebrates with the Gornik Zabrze fans

Trophy lift...Podolski took ownership of the club a day a later

GYOR COMPLETE RISE FROM THE ASHES

Just over ten years ago, Gyor ETO's future hung in the balance.

The club had gone bankrupt and had lost their licence to compete in Hungary's top flight. Forced to start anew in the country's third tier, even the most ardently optimist Gyor supporter wouldn't have envisaged that they would be the best club in the country a decade later.

Gyor is a historic club in Hungary. Sixty years ago, they had gone as far as the semi-final of the European Cup, losing to Eusebio's Benfica. It's a team that has played against Manchester United and Juventus in European ties. A club with a rich academy and track-record of producing top players, most notably Milos Kerkez and Armin Pecsi of Liverpool in the last few years.

But by 2016, they had fallen a long way from those heights and were essentially playing against semi-pro clubs and fighting for their survival.

It would take them two years to get out of the third tier. The club then spent more than five years in Hungary's second tier, and for a while it looked like they were destined to stay there.

But then along came Balazs Borbely. Appointed as manager in April 2024 with just five games of the season to go, he won all five to lead Gyor to promotion to the top flight.

A former Slovakia international of Hungarian descent, Borbely implemented a fast-paced attacking style, with modern components resembling a mixture of Jurgen Klopp's pressing intermingled with Pep Guardiola's possession style.

In his first full season, Borbely led Gyor to fourth in Hungary's top flight, earning a spot in the qualifying rounds of the Conference League where they lost to Rapid Vienna 3-2 in the play-offs.

That disappointment would catapult them to unprecedented heights in the league.

For seven consecutive seasons, Ferencvaros dominated Hungarian football. During this seven-year period nobody had come even close to pipping them to the title. Until now.

With Borbely's fast-paced attacking football, Gyor didn't just become genuine contenders, they did the unthinkable and edged Ferencvaros to the league title. In the end, they won the league by a single point, beating Ferencvaros home and away to secure the trophy.

It was a remarkable achievement for a side who seemed so doomed a decade ago, and who had only been promoted two seasons prior.

Yet it didn't take long for Ferencvaros to re-establish their dominance. Just a few weeks after Gyor's title triumph, the Budapest giants swooped to hire Borbely as a replacement for their outgoing coach Robbie Keane.

Borbely will now look to win the title again, this time against his old club. But Gyor, who've hired Mexican Efrain Juarez as Borbely's replacement, have proven time and again that they're capable of fighting against the odds. They won't relinquish their title easily.

Bence Bocsak

From the ashes ...Gyor players celebrate their title
Credit: Gyor FC

BULGARIA

LEVSKI SOFIA END LUDOGORETS' DYNASTY

The footballing dictatorship of Ludogorets, champions of Bulgaria 14 times in a row, has finally been broken. This was a level of dominance that had bored the rest of Bulgarian football. True, Ludogorets were outstanding between 2014 and 2017, putting Bulgarian football on the map by twice competing in the Champions League group stages and taking on the likes of Real Madrid, Liverpool, Arsenal and PSG. But since then their titles have been won by inertia.

Usurping them in 2026 were Levski Sofia, the most popular team in the country and the second most successful with 27 titles, now four behind CSKA.

How did Levski become champions again, 17 years after their last title?

The turning point came in January 2025 with the appointment of Spaniard Julio Velazquez as head coach. Having mostly worked in the lower leagues of Spain, Portugal, Netherlands and Italy, his appointment was met with a level of scepticism. But from day one he got Levski playing to a specific possession-based style that appealed to the fans. The aim of his first season was second place, which Levski duly achieved, albeit 11 points behind the champions.

Title winner... Levski goalkeeper Svetoslav Vutsov

This season they moved into top spot on the opening day thanks to a 5-0 win over Montana, and never looked back.

The key match was a 3-1 victory away to Cherno More back in October, a game that they trailed in at half-time. After that second-half turnaround, the outcome of the title race was rarely in doubt. They ended the season with 81 points, 14 more than both CSKA 1948 and Ludogorets who finished second and third respectively, with CSKA Sofia fourth.

On the pitch, the star was Brazilian winger Everton Bala, who claimed the league's Golden Boot with 18 goals, and impressive goalkeeper Svetoslav Vutsov. But the key ingredient was the leadership of Velazquez, who built a cohesive collective with few stars.

Perhaps the real hero, though, was club president and former striker Nasko Sirakov, who rescued the club from financial crisis after taking over as owner in 2020. The man who scored a record 209 goals for the club and won six league titles has made himself even more of a club legend by restoring Levski to their former heights and ending the Ludogorets dynasty.

As for the former champions, they are searching for a new manager after parting company with Per-Mathias Hogmo. The Norwegian was hired back in November, just as Ludogorets were beginning to fall further behind Levski, but was unable to generate the kind of winning streak that has been so typical over the past 14 years.

Rumen Paytashev

AUSTRIA'S THIRD CHAMPIONS IN FOUR YEARS

There was a time not so long ago when Austrian football fans wondered whether Red Bull Salzburg would ever be toppled from their perch. Backed by the riches of the local energy drinks giant, the club operated in a different sphere to the rest of the Austrian Bundesliga, winning ten league titles and eight cups between 2014 and 2023.

In the three years since, however, they have not won a single trophy. It has been an unthinkable turn of events for Austria's perennial champions, with Sturm Graz's back-to-back titles in 2024 and 2025 now followed by a stunning league-cup double for LASK – the first time the Linz outfit have won either trophy since 1965.

The key to their success has been head coach Didi Kuhbauer, a household name in Austrian football who guided minnows Wolfsberger to the cup last season before accepting an offer to return to LASK in October 2025. The club, second from bottom at the time, were in dire straits. But under Kuhbauer's leadership, they immediately revived their fortunes and lost only two more games all season.

Austrian champions ...players of LASK lift the Bundesliga shield

In the end, though, LASK's margin of victory over Sturm Graz stood at only two points due to their form prior to Kuhbauer's appointment – a period in which they lost six of their opening nine matches under Joao Sacramento.

Leading the line on the pitch for Kuhbauer's side was Sasa Kalajdzic, the Austria forward who joined on a season-long loan from Wolverhampton Wanderers last summer in a bid to revive a career that has been beset by cruciate ligament injuries in both Germany and England. An imposing figure at 6ft 7in tall, Kalajdzic notched seven goals and 11 assists and dovetailed beautifully with fellow forwards Moses Usor and Samuel Adeniran, whose combined tally of 23 goals also made a huge contribution to the club's title tilt.

Whether LASK can retain their crown without the talismanic Kalajdzic, who has returned to his parent club, remains to be seen. But the fact the Bundesliga shield is now proudly on display in Linz after two years in Graz serves as testament to the league's newfound competitiveness. One or two years without a Salzburg title could have been the exception; three looks more like the new norm.

Lee Wingate

UKRAINE

LNZ CHERKASY'S REMARKABLE RISE

Following the Ukrainian Premier League's inaugural season in 1992, Dynamo Kyiv and Shakhtar Donetsk have maintained a fierce stranglehold on the division and swept up every single title between them.

This season, however, a new kid on the block threatened to upset the established order in the UPL. At the winter break, LNZ Cherkasy from central Ukraine topped the standings and, despite losing their star striker Prosper Obah to rivals Shakhtar midway through the campaign, remained in the running for the title until the latter stages of the season.

In the end, it wasn't to be. A late collapse – only two wins from their last eight games – saw Cherkasy slip 12 points behind eventual winners Shakhtar. But even being in contention was a remarkable achievement.

Intense philosophy ...LNZ Cherkasy head coach Vitaliy Ponomarev

As recently as 2021, Cherkasy were in the fourth tier and playing amateur football. That year was a turning point for the club, which was renamed from LNZ-Lebedyn and relocated to the regional capital of Cherkasy by their owner, a major agricultural holding by the name of the LNZ Group.

They immediately achieved three successive promotions to the UPL – a meteoric rise that is less attributable to financial backing than it is to strong leadership. Chief executive Vasyl Kayuk showed 15 players the exit door last summer, claiming they did not care if they won or lost – a bold move for any executive, let alone a 26-year-old. But he followed it up by recruiting a group of young, predominantly Ukrainian players who have bought into head coach Vitaliy Ponomarev's intense philosophy centred on physical fitness and teamwork.

Although they fell short with their title challenge, the club qualified for Europe for the first time and will cement their reputation as a force to be reckoned with if they can negotiate the Conference League qualifying rounds. For now, the Dynamo-Shakhtar duopoly is still in place. But this season has shown it may not be for much longer.

Lee Wingate

AZERBAIJAN

QARABAG KNOCKED OFF THEIR PERCH

Azerbaijani football has new champions. Sabah clinched the title for the first time, ending the long-standing dominance of Qarabag, who had won 11 of the previous 12 editions, with the only exception being the triumph of Neftchi in 2021.

Sabah is a young club, founded in 2017 and joining the top flight a year later, and based, like the vast majority of teams competing in the Premyer Liqasi, in the capital of Baku.

The title was sealed with four games to spare, finishing ahead of Qarabag in the standings. The side managed by Lithuanian Valdas Dambrauskas concluded the campaign with 79 points, courtesy of 24 wins, six draws and just three defeats.

A couple of weeks after they'd secured the title, they completed a historic double, defeating Zira 2-1 in the Azerbaijan Cup final. Adding to the significance of this achievement was the elimination of Qarabag in the semi-finals. Having beaten them in last year's cup final as well, there is a sense of the passing of the torch as the dominant force in Azerbaijani football.

The overturning of the established order can partly be explained by Qarabag's European commitments. It is no coincidence that Gurban Gurbanov's side fell behind domestically in the same season they made it to the Champions League knockout rounds for the very first time, eventually knocked out by Newcastle United in the play-offs.

Knocked off their perch...Qarabag

Now, Sabah will aim to make the group stage of a European competition for the first time, entering the Champions League first qualifying round, while Qarabag will dust themselves down and attempt to reassert their domestic dominance.

Emanuele Giulianelli

TORREENSE MAKE HISTORY

Torreense became the 14th different team to win the Portuguese Cup since the competition's inception in the 1938-39 season. What made the achievement truly historic was the fact that the modest outfit from the small town of Torres Vedras, 50km north of Lisbon, became the first team from outside the top flight to lift the trophy.

Torreense came into final against the previous season's double winners Sporting at the iconic Jamor Stadium as huge underdogs. But a well-worked corner was nodded in by Kevin Zohir early doors and the minnows held on relatively comfortably until the break.

Sporting turned up the pressure in the second half and when prolific striker Luis Suarez equalised in the 54th minute a Sporting win looked inevitable.

But having drawn level, the Lions lowered their intensity – and they would pay a heavy price for failing to keep Torreense on the back foot.

The decisive moment came in extra-time when Maxi Araujo fouled Ismail Seydy for a penalty, resulting in a red card for the Sporting left-back. It was fitting that captain Stopira thumped home the spot-kick to clinch the victory. The 38-year-old, who just a few weeks later was playing for Cape Verde at the World Cup, had expertly marshalled the defence all game, blunting what had been by far the most potent attack in Portugal during the season.

It could have been even better for Torreense, with the cup final sandwiched in between the two legs of their relegation-promotion play-off. The club has not played in the top flight since 1992 and if they had completed their long-awaited return, it would have capped a truly fairy-tale season.

But it wasn't to be. Four days after their cup final heroics, they travelled to Casa Pia for the second leg of the play-offs and lost 2-0, following on from a goalless home tie.

"There was a lack of common sense by whoever organises the schedule," complained manager Luis Tralhao, having watched his team play three of the biggest games in the club's history in the space of one week. It was difficult not to sympathise with him, but their name will forever be written in the annals of Portuguese football.

They will certainly bid for promotion next season – although they will have to balance that with the demands of European football, having secured Portugal's Europa League ticket thanks to their cup success. For this tiny club, with a ground that seats just under 2,500, the adventure will go on.

Tom Kundert

Match-winner... Stopira celebrates scoring his penalty against Sporting

FRANCE

SHOWBIZ LE MANS REACH THE TOP FLIGHT

Le Mans' Stade Marie-Marvingt was inaugurated back in 2011. The club's state-of-the-art home, situated within Le Mans' iconic racetrack, was designed to host Ligue 1 football, but by 2013 the club had gone into bankruptcy and been demoted to the sixth tier.

Thirteen years later and the stadium will finally host a Ligue 1 game thanks to stunning back-to-back promotions.

Last summer, Le Mans' objective was simply to consolidate their place in Ligue 2. But August saw the arrival of new owners, OutField, who provided fresh momentum and ambition. They brought with them big-name backers such as tennis star Novak Djokovic, Formula 1 drivers Felipe Massa and Kevin Magnussen and, later, Real Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois.

As well as glamour and profile, OutField also brought expertise. "It is important that they [their investors] know the world of sport because it is a world that has its own way of working," Le Mans president Thierry Gomez said.

There were more likely candidates to go up to Ligue 1, notably Saint-Etienne, who retained their big-money signings from the previous season. Unlike *Les Verts*, Le Mans' major strength did not lie in the quality of their playing squad but in the workings of their manager, Patrick Videira. It is telling that Le Mans are not expected to be plundered of their playing talent over the course of this summer, yet their coach was the subject of an approach from Lens, who next season will play in the Champions League after finishing Ligue 1 runners-up.

Videira chose to stay loyal to Le Mans and penned a contract extension, a sign of the ambition at the club, while Lens instead replaced Crystal Palace-bound Pierre Sage with Dino Toppmoller.

Le Mans' owners have said that the rapid rise has caused "problems that will have to be resolved". Given where the club was, however, these are good problems to have.

Luke Entwistle

Promotion party... Le Mans players

VILLAGE CLUB JOIN GERMAN ELITE

Soon to embark on their first-ever Bundesliga adventure, Elversberg are proof of the old adage that the best things come in small packages.

An undersized, low-profile club from a village of just under 13,000 inhabitants in the Saarland region of south-west Germany, Elversberg deservedly secured promotion as second-tier runners-up.

Now, they are set to become the smallest locale to compete in the Bundesliga and will host the likes of Bayern and Dortmund in the decidedly small-scale surroundings of their home ground, the Stadion an der Kaiserlinde. Its official name is the Ursapharm-Arena, named after the pharmaceutical company run by club president Dominik Holzer.

Such is the lack of infrastructure here that containers have doubled as changing rooms. In order to meet Bundesliga venue requirements, extensive renovations are now the order of the day, with a new North Stand under construction and scheduled to be ready in January 2027. This will increase capacity from less than 10,000 to 15,000.

Pitch invasion... Elversberg players celebrate with their Supporters

As recently as 2021-22, SVE were in the regional leagues, the fourth grade of the German pyramid. But don't expect the top-flight new boys to automatically be blown away by the *Deutschland's* behemoth battalions. Within the side so artfully put together by head coach Vincent Wagner a number of real talents stand out, not least goal-hungry Bulgaria winger Lukas Petkov, ex-Germany youth team defensive midfielder Amara Conde and Maximilian Rohr at centre-back, the latter renowned for his rocket-shot from distance.

"Before we sealed our place in the Bundesliga, a friend of mine said that if we managed to pull it off, it would be like man landing on the moon," declared a joyous Wagner amidst the wild promotion celebrations. "And now we've achieved it, we have the brutal challenge of surviving in the Bundesliga – and that will be our journey to Mars.

"We'll carry on with the same style as previously. The only goal we have is to keep playing our football and to pick up as many points as possible. We are inexperienced at the top level, but you can only gain that experience through doing it."

Nick Bidwell

SYMBOLIC CLUB SEALS HISTORIC PROMOTION

Going up...Amedspor celebrate promotion

The promotion of Amed SFK – better known as Amedspor – to the Turkish top flight for the first time represents a hugely significant moment, not only for the club but for the region of Kurdistan.

The team is based in Diyarbakir, eastern Turkey, the largest Kurdish-majority city in the country, and was named after the city until 2014. Then, the club's hierarchy decided to change the name of the team and adopt the city's Kurdish name, Amed. This was not just a linguistic detail, but a seismic shift in identity, effectively becoming the Kurdistan national team in the hearts of the Kurdish people.

It was a change that also brought complications. The city has been at the centre of the dispute between the Turkish state and Kurdish separatists for decades. In becoming a symbol of Kurdistan, Amedspor also became a target of anti-Kurdish sentiment – both from Turkey's traditional footballing establishment and opposition fans. The Turkish federation initially refused to recognise the name change and imposed a fine on the club. Persistent racist violence against Amedspor supporters has led to the club frequently being forced to play behind closed doors and the fans subjected to travel bans.

Yet that treatment also strengthened the resolve of its fans. Over the years, the club has become an increasingly unifying force for the Kurds, one capable of filling the terraces of their 33,000-capacity Diyarbakir Stadium. The momentum has built, with this latest promotion achieved after only two seasons in the second tier.

Next season will bring fresh challenges but for a football club that has come to represent a symbol of resistance, they will embrace them all.

Emanuele Giulianelli

FC COPENHAGEN LOOKING UP AGAIN

On paper, 2025-26 could hardly have gone much worse for FC Copenhagen, who began the campaign chasing their fourth title in five years and ended it in their lowest position since 2000. However, a backroom reshuffle halfway through the campaign and a strong finish has left the club looking up again for 2026-27.

Last summer was a busy one for Copenhagen's directors, who reinvested all of the €20 million they received from Porto for young midfielder Victor Froholdt (see page 68) on a collection of new signings. Among them was ex-Dortmund forward Youssoufa Moukoko, who four years ago was Germany's youngest-ever player at a World Cup but had since struggled to fulfil his potential.

Would the reshuffle work out? In short, no. By the end of March, Copenhagen had parted company with both their sporting director and manager, finding themselves in the relegation round for the first time since the league introduced a mid-season split.

Ex-player Bo Svensson was hired as coach and was able to straighten things out. He won seven league games out of eight and finished top of the relegation table to qualify for the European play-off, where two extra-time goals by Moukoko secured a 3-1 win against Brondby and a spot in the Conference League qualifiers.

Former player... Copenhagen head coach Bo Svensson

With more talent following Froholdt on the academy production line, and a European campaign to look forward to, things are looking up again for Denmark's most successful club.

Jamie Evans

BUSINESS AS USUAL

While some of Europe's footballing dynasties were toppled this year, others remain very much intact – and some may only just be getting started.

After Ludogorets missed out on the Bulgarian title, Red Star Belgrade of **Serbia** now hold the record as Europe's most dominant club side by claiming their ninth title in a row – although the campaign was not without its hiccups. Before the winter break, Red Star trailed rivals Partizan Belgrade in the table, leading to the exit of head coach Vladen Milojevic. But once Dejan Stankovic, who won three titles at the club between 2019 and 2022, was reinstated at the end of December, they rediscovered their usual dominance. Under their former midfielder, Red Star embarked on a 11-game winning streak, eventually finished ten points clear of second place (and 13 ahead of Partizan in third) and added the Serbian Cup for good measure.

Next behind Red Star on eight titles in a row are **Slovakian** champions Slovan Bratislava, who cruised to their latest crown with a ten-point winning margin. If there is a ray of hope for the rest of the top flight, it might be in the fact that Vladimir Weiss, who has overseen Slovan's last six titles, stepped down in order to take charge of the national team. His replacement, Yaya Toure, will be embarking on his first head coaching role, and nobody will want to take advantage of this transitional phase more than runners-up DAC, who have finished second five times in the past eight years but have never won the title.

In **Gibraltar**, Lincoln Red Imps won their sixth consecutive crown while in **Wales**, The New Saints made it five titles in a row and 13 in 15 years. Changes are coming to the Cymru Premier next season, including an expansion to 16 teams and the introduction of VAR, but whether that can lead to a changing of the guard at the top of the table remains to be seen.

Returning coach... Red Star Belgrade boss Dejan Stankovic

In **Turkey**, Galatasaray drew level with their own record of four consecutive league titles. The title was mathematically secured in the penultimate game of the season with a 4-2 victory over Antalyaspor, but the truly decisive match happened a couple of weeks earlier, when they beat arch-rivals and nearest challengers Fenerbahce 3-0. Head coach Okan Buruk was a key player in the last Gala side to win four in a row, and now has the chance to go one better. If he can lead them to the title in 2027, it will not only be a new record streak but will also put the club on 28 championships in total – level with Fenerbahce, who finished second for the fifth season in a row. The season had barely begun when Fener opted to fire Jose Mourinho in late August, and his replacement, Domenico Tedesco, didn't make it to the end of the season either, paying the price for that defeat at Galatasaray.

Who will be the next team to start a period of dominance in their country? It could be Egnatia, who won their third consecutive crown in **Albania**, although it was a tight affair. After placing third in the regular season and advancing to the championship round, they finished level on points with Elbasani and pipped them to the league title on their head-to-head record.

Jamie Evans

ROMANIA & LUXEMBOURG

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

Universitatea Craiova is a club with a complicated history. The original team was founded in 1948 and managed to win four **Romanian** league titles before being dissolved in 1991. Thirty-five years on and there are now two sides who claim to be the genuine heirs to the original club – FC U Craiova 1948 and Universitatea Craiova – both of whom play at the Ion Oblemenco Stadium. This season, the latter were crowned champions of Romania for the first time since they were re-formed back in 2013, and compounded their dominance by lifting the domestic cup too.

Romanian champions... Universitatea Craiova

The achievement of Thun, who won the Swiss title in their first season after winning promotion to the top flight, received plenty of praise (see page 36), but remarkably, they weren't the only newly-promoted team to win a European league this season. In **Luxembourg**, the title went to Atert Bissen in their first-ever top-flight campaign. The club has been transformed by the leadership of their Portuguese owner Carlos Teixeira, rising from the third tier to national champions in just two years. They did it in dramatic style too, beating title rivals Differdange 1-0 on the final day of the season to leapfrog them into top spot.

Jamie Evans

BACK ON TOP

Club Brugge haven't quite been able to instil the kind of dominance in **Belgium** that other top flights have seen, but having now won seven of the last 11 titles they can undoubtedly be regarded as the team of the last decade. Their latest title looked unlikely in December when, after a run of just two wins in seven matches in all competitions, they sacked head coach Nicky Hayen and reappointed Ivan Leko. The Croatian, who led the team to the title in 2017-18, won 18 of his 23 league games, losing only three, and ultimately finished four points clear of previous champions Union Saint-Gilloise.

In **Greece**, AEK Athens also benefitted from a change of coach as Marko Nikolic, appointed last summer, helped them win the title. The Serbian, who has now won trophies in five different countries, only lost two league games all season. The crucial victory was in April, when they beat Olympiacos 1-0 away to move five points clear of their arch-rivals and nearest challengers, who had won the title in 2024-25. AEK have now been champions twice in the last four years.

Zenit St Petersburg won six **Russian** titles in a row between 2019 and 2024, and returned to winning ways this season. It was a particularly painful silver medal for reigning champions Krasnodar, who led the league until the penultimate game of the season when a last-minute defeat to Dynamo Moscow allowed Zenit to leapfrog them into top spot.

Another country where normal service resumed was **Croatia**, where Dinamo Zagreb won their eighth title in nine years. It was won in emphatic fashion too, as they finished 18 points clear of runners-up and arch-rivals Hajduk Split, whose title drought extended to 21 years. Rijeka, champions in 2024-25, were never in contention, winning only two of their first ten games before recovering to finish fourth.

In **Cyprus**, Pafos were expected to build upon their maiden title in 2024-25, but instead finished fourth, a huge 25 points adrift of winners Omonia Nicosia. The former champions, who signed ex-Brazil centre-back David Luiz ahead of their Champions League debut, sacked two managers over the course of the season but couldn't get anywhere near Omonia, who won their 22nd title and second in six years.

Elsewhere, Borac Banja Luka ran away with the title in **Bosnia & Herzegovina**, finishing 15 points ahead of defending champions Zrinjski Mostar to win their second title in three years and third in six. In **Armenia**, Ararat-Armenia won their first title since 2020, Hapoel Be'er Sheva won the **Israeli** title for the first time since 2018, and Larne were champions of **Northern Ireland** for the third time in four years.

Jamie Evans

Belgium's club of the decade...Club Brugge players lift the trophy

POLAND

ANOTHER EXCELLENT EKSTRAKLASA

In a league that has seen five different champions in the last eight years, Lech Poznan's defence of Poland's Ekstraklasa was an achievement of some note. In what continues to be the most open league in Europe, the top four were separated by just five points, with the champions only pulling clear right at the end. Even more remarkably, as late as April, all 18 teams still had a mathematical chance of winning the league or being relegated.

Adding to the fun next season will be Wisla Krakow, one of the most successful clubs in Polish history, who won promotion back to the top flight after a four-year absence.

Jamie Evans

CZECH REPUBLIC

FANS SPOIL SLAVIA'S TITLE PARTY

Slavia Prague should have won the Czech First League title in the most perfect way possible, sealing the crown with a victory over arch-rivals Sparta. But their achievement was completely overshadowed by the behaviour of their supporters.

Slavia were 3-2 up and seven minutes into second-half stoppage time, literally seconds from being mathematically sure of finishing top, when hundreds of their own fans stormed onto the pitch at the Fortuna Arena. With players of both sides forced to escape down the tunnel, the match was abandoned and awarded to the visitors, whose goalkeeper Jakub Surovcik appeared to be struck in the face by a flare.

The club's leadership took swift action, closing the north stand and refusing to re-open it until all the perpetrators had been punished, and pledging lifetime bans.

"What took place at the end of yesterday's derby at Fortuna Arena is the most difficult moment in the modern history of the club," declared club president Jaroslav Tvrdik. "This is not football. This is not Slavia. It is a disgrace that we all bear."

The result meant that Slavia's players had to wait a few more days to secure their second title in a row, with a 5-1 win at home to Jablonec, but the gloss had certainly been taken off it.

Jamie Evans

Czech champions ...Slavia Prague

JOHOR DARUL TA'ZIM EDGE CLOSER TO WORLD RECORD

There are invincible seasons and there are invincible seasons. Johor Darul Ta'zim, led by ex-Liverpool star Luis Garcia as CEO, came within two points of making it a perfect campaign in the Malaysia Super League. The team from down near the Singapore border dropped just two points in the 24-game season, as a 1-1 draw with Terengganu a month before the end put the slightest of blemishes on the record.

That was April 11. In the final game on May 10, JDT thrashed Kelantan The Real Warriors 14-1. It took the goals for column to an incredible 117. Just ten were conceded. It also means that you have to go back to 2013 to find the last time Johor were not Malaysian champions. The team's unbeaten run now stretches to 105 league games and all the way back to April 2021.

The world record stands at 108, and the club are looking forward to breaking it at the start of the 2026-27 campaign, which kicks off in August.

Garcia's influence can be seen in the heavy Spanish presence in both the playing and non-playing staff, including former Watford head coach Xisco Munoz. Their cosmopolitan squad also includes representatives from Brazil, France, Argentina, the Netherlands, Portugal, Colombia and others.

In March they became the first-ever Malaysian team to reach the last eight of the AFC Champions League Elite, and completed a domestic treble by winning both the Malaysia FA Cup and Malaysia Cup during the season.

It's fair to say such dominance is not helping anyone. There is no title race to get excited about, while it is difficult for the title winners' owner, the Crown Prince of Johor, to achieve ambitions of being the best in Asia without being pushed at home.

Malaysian football, still reeling from a naturalisation scandal that saw seven national team players banned for 12 months last year, is stuck in a rut.

John Duerden

Dominant...Players of Johor Darul Ta'zim present their three domestic trophies
Photo credit: Johor Darul Ta'zim FC

ASIA

ASIA'S OTHER INVINCIBLES

JDT were not the only unbeaten champions in Asia. Far to the west, Al Ain swept to the 2025-26 **United Arab Emirates** Pro League title in some style, as a 5-0 win over Sharjah brought a 15th championship with two rounds to spare. The team from the oasis city near the border with Oman became the first in the league's history to go unbeaten throughout the 26-game campaign. Having a striker such as Kodjo Fo-Doh Laba helped as the Togo international rolled back the years, 34 of them, with 22 goals.

Elsewhere, Lion City Sailors won a second successive **Singapore** Premier League title without losing a game. The prize was clinched with a goalless draw against BG Tampines Rovers on May 3, but it wasn't quite an unbeaten season. After the championship was clinched, there were two games left to play and they both ended in defeat to put only the slightest dampener on things. It was some consolation for Spanish coach Jesus Casas, who steered Iraq through much of the 2026 World Cup qualification only to lose his job near the end.

There was much more drama in **Indonesia** with the top two finishing level on points. Indeed, in most leagues Persib would not have won their tenth title as their goal difference was inferior to Borneo Samarinda's, but head-to-head points swung it in favour of the Javanese club. It was harsh on Borneo, who won eight of their last nine games but will have to wait for their second title. Persib, one of Southeast Asia's biggest clubs, didn't care, celebrating wildly in the streets of Indonesia's second city.

John Duerden

Street party... Persib parade the Indonesian league trophy

AFRICA'S CHANGING OF THE GUARD

The established order in several of Africa's leading leagues was given a serious rattle this past season with long-standing dominance brought to an end.

Africa's most successful club, Al Ahly, could only manage a third-place finish in **Egypt** and as a result failed to qualify for the CAF Champions League after 23 years of successive seasons of competing. Although they were only three points off top spot, their Danish coach, Jess Thorup, was promptly sacked at the end of the campaign.

Instead, Zamalek took the league title, despite suffering the ignominy of a 3-0 loss to Ahly in the Cairo derby three rounds from the end of the season. By then, their lead was substantive enough to ensure a first league title in four years. Pyramids, the country's emerging force who were crowned champions of Africa in 2025, came second.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the continent, a run of eight championships in a row came to an end in **South Africa** for Mamelodi Sundowns – although their disappointment was tempered by winning the Champions League.

The Sundowns' long-standing domestic dominance was brought to an end by Orlando Pirates, who won their first South African championship title in 14 years. Pirates were chasing for most of the season but profited from a slump in results for Sundowns, who became distracted by the Champions League final. Sundowns, whose coach Miguel Cardoso complained repeatedly about playing too many matches, also finished their campaign two rounds early. That meant the Pirates knew exactly what they needed from their last two games – three points – to be crowned champions. They faltered at home in the penultimate round against cup winners Durban City, but won at struggling Orbit College to cross the line.

In the end, Pirates, coached by ex-Morocco centre-back Abdeslam Ouaddou, finished on 69 points, one ahead of Sundowns, with the most wins (21), most goals scored (58), and fewest conceded (12).

Egyptian champions... Zamalek supporters celebrate in the streets of Cairo

In **Tunisia**, Club Africain finally got the better of long-standing rivals Esperance by sealing their first Ligue 1 title since 2015. It took a dramatic stoppage-time goal from Ghaith Zaalouni in the two sides' head-to-head clash on the penultimate weekend of the season, with the defender striking from outside the penalty area in the 16th minute of added time, to put Club Africain five points clear with one match remaining. It was Club Africain's 14th league crown and marked an 11th championship for 76-year-old coach Faouzi Benzarti, who had won five times previously with Esperance.

Enugu Rangers were crowned champions of **Nigeria** for the second time in three years on the last day of the season, with a 2-1 away win over Ikorodu City ensuring a one-point advantage at the head of the standings. Rivers United, coached by former Nigeria international Finidi George, finished runners-up for a second successive season, while Shooting Stars were third.

Mouloudia Alger were runaway champions in **Algeria** with a ten-point gap over second-placed JS Saoura as they retained their title for a third campaign in a row.

Mark Gleeson

APERTURAS WRAP-UP

A mixture of formulas are used across South America. And amongst those who split the year into separate championships, there was a mixture of outcomes.

The outlier came in **Uruguay**. Racing are one of the many neighbourhood clubs in Montevideo, founded in 1919. And for the first time in over a century they are first division champions, admittedly in a very short, 15-game Apertura tournament. After losing the opening match, they won nine of the next ten to wrap things up with two rounds to spare. The romance may well be slightly tarnished by the fact that Racing are now part of a multi-club operation, with a joint stake of Bayern Munich and Los Angeles FC, and the club has been receiving investments with a view to be used as a place to identify and develop new talent. Racing's task was also eased by a disastrous few months for the traditional big two, Penarol and Nacional, both of whom also failed to make the cut in the Copa Libertadores.

Elsewhere, the old giants maintained their superiority. Olimpia came out on top in **Paraguay** by a ten-point margin, with great rivals Cerro Porteno giving priority to the Libertadores, and Libertad, such a force in the current century, going through such an awful phase that they were the only side in the Libertadores to lose all six group games.

In **Peru**, Alianza Lima brought an end to three consecutive triumphs of traditional rivals Universitario. The biggest challenge came from altitude teams – the free-scoring Cienciano and runners-up Los Chankas, a relatively new club, founded in 1989, who enjoyed by far their best-ever season and finished second.

Two countries use a play-off format, with the top eight from a league phase moving on to the decisive stages – and here there was a delightful contrast. In **Colombia**, the top two after the league phase were Atletico Nacional of Medellin and Junior of Barranquilla, and these two then forced their way through the knockout matches to meet in a two-legged final. A 3-0 victory in the first leg set up Junior for a 3-1 aggregate win. Both teams, however, disappointed in the continental competitions

Title winner...Junior star Teofilo Gutierrez kisses the Colombian Apertura trophy

It was a different story in **Venezuela**, where the top flight has demonstrated an encouraging level of depth and competitiveness. All of the country's representatives had good moments on the continental stage, with two teams still competing in the play-off stages of the Sudamericana, and that level of competition was reflected in the domestic league. Carabobo and Academia Puerto Cabello, both narrowly eliminated in the Sudamericana, grabbed the last two spots in the final eight – and then found form at the right time and went on to contest the final, won 2-1 by Carabobo. Caracas, meanwhile, are one of those two Venezuelan sides still standing in the Sudamericana yet did not even make the domestic top eight – an eloquent symbol of a league which is showing a surprising strength.

Tim Vickery

6 of the best

Under the radar coaches

Jamie Evans picks out some notable managerial achievements from the 2025-26 campaign

1 Dick SCHREUDER

NEC NIJMEGEN

Never in the 126-year history of NEC Nijmegen has the club finished as high as they did in 2025-26 under the guidance of Schreuder.

When he was appointed last summer, the 54-year-old's CV may not have inspired huge excitement. He had been fired from his last role, with Castellon in the Spanish second tier, while previous assistant assignments had taken him to Hoffenheim, Philadelphia and Barnet.

But it proved a perfect fit. Only champions PSV scored more goals than NEC, and although his brand of all-out attacking football carried plenty of risk – as demonstrated by the 5-1 defeat to AZ in the Dutch Cup final – it also brought plenty of entertainment as fans flocked to the Goffertstadion.

A place in the Champions League qualifying rounds awaits a coach who has never managed a European match before, but will go into it completely without fear.

2 Claudio GIRALDEZ

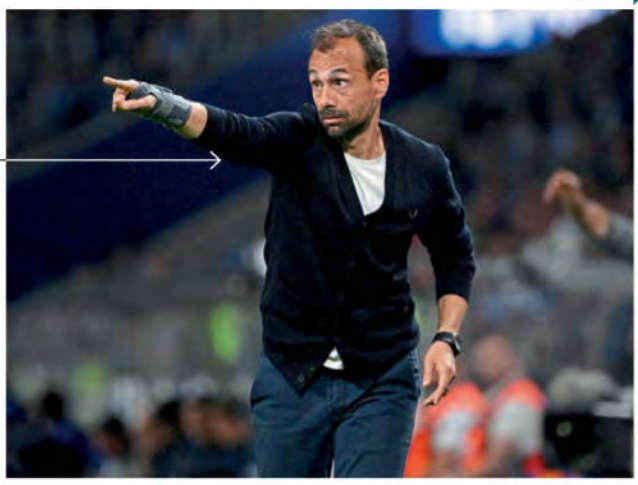
CELTA VIGO

Celta Vigo were hovering above the relegation zone in March 2024 when a 36-year-old Giraldez was promoted from the B team to replace Rafael Benitez as coach. Two years on, they are celebrating their joint-highest finish in the last 23 years and looking forward to a second consecutive Europa League campaign.

Giraldez has the steely determination often found in coaches whose playing careers didn't quite work out. Born on the outskirts of Vigo, he was drafted into Real Madrid's academy as a teenager and played a single game at left-back for the reserves, but ended up starring for a series of Galician clubs in the Spanish lower-leagues before retiring at 31 and starting his coaching journey.

With key players like Marcos Alonso, Borja Iglesias and the iconic Iago Aspas now in their twilight years, this summer will require some rebuilding for Giraldez.

3 Hugo OLIVEIRA
FAMALICAO



Oliveira was Benfica's goalkeeping coach when he was summoned to England to work as Marco Silva's assistant, first with Hull City and then later at Watford, Everton and Fulham.

At the end of 2024 he set out on his own, becoming head coach of Famalicao. After securing seventh place in his first campaign, he went even better in 2025-26. The team's fifth-place finish was the highest in their history, and with a touch more cutting edge – they drew five of their last seven matches – they might well have secured the extra four points they needed to make it into the top four ahead of Braga and qualify for Europe for the first time.

The 47-year-old's efforts have not gone unnoticed – he was linked with the post at Craven Cottage following Silva's appointment at Benfica.

4 Arda TURAN
SHAKHTAR DONETSK

"You need to get out of your comfort zone to be successful," Turan told *Sky Sports* at the end of 2025, and that's certainly what the 39-year-old has done by taking a job in a war zone.

The former Atletico Madrid, Barcelona and Turkey midfielder began his coaching career in his home country with Eyupspor, leading the club to promotion and then an impressive sixth place in the top flight, before moving to Shakhtar last summer.

Still reeling from finishing third in 2024-25 – the first time they'd placed outside the top two since 1996 – Shakhtar were aching for success, and Turan delivered. As well as leading them to their 16th Ukrainian title, he also reached the semi-finals of the Conference League despite having to play all their "home" games in Poland.

5 Jordan HADAWAY
LLANDUDNO

Next season, the youngest top-flight manager in Europe will be in Wales after the 24-year-old Hadaway guided Llandudno to promotion from the second-tier Cymru North.

The Cymru Premier is to be expanded by four teams for the 2026-27 campaign, which opened up two extra promotion spots in each of the two second tiers. But Hadaway's side didn't need them, topping the North table with 26 wins in 30 games and only two defeats.

Despite his tender age, Hadaway has already been at the club for three years, and is set for a longer stay after penning a two-year contract extension in May. "We achieved our aim this season, which was promotion," he said. "Now it's about making our club an established club again in the Welsh Premier League."

6 Jens Berthel ASKOU
MOTHERWELL

Amid Hearts' challenge for the Scottish title, the impressive showing by Askou's Motherwell almost went unnoticed. The Steelmen finished fourth but had plenty to say in the title race, taking valuable points off each of the top three over the course of the campaign, and at one stage even looked like they could be contenders.

The improvement from the eighth-place finish the season before can be attributed to Askou, who left his role as assistant manager of Danish side Copenhagen to take charge last summer and immediately built a side that was solid defensively, pleasing on the eye and highly effective.

Among the 43-year-old's admirers were Ligue 1 side Toulouse, who swooped to hire him in May for the 2026-27 campaign. "Sometimes you have to leave great things behind to create new ones," he said in his departing statement.

TWO IN A ROW FOR PSG

French giants see off Arsenal on penalties to seal back-to-back Champions League triumphs

Two in a row...PSG captain Marquinhos lifts the Champinos League trophy

Winning the Champions League demands the clear-headed strategy of distance runners in gold medal pursuit at the Olympic Games: tuck in with the pack then, at the bell, spring the decisive move which burns off the field and punishes the fading stamina of the rest of the pack.

Hence, defending champions Paris Saint-Germain set off by trundling through the gears in last autumn's group stage. They finished 11th out of the 36 clubs, won four matches, drew two and lost two. Goals scored 21, conceded 11. No comparison with leaders Arsenal who won all their eight matches, with a goals tally of 23-4 and ten more points.

But look at the sprint finish: PSG saw off Monaco in the play-offs then Chelsea, Liverpool and Bayern Munich to reach the final; played eight, won six, drew two, lost none, goals tally 23-11. Arsenal played six, won three, drew three, goals 6-2. Statistics illustrate trends. Not decisive but significant.

PSG raised their game in the spring in defiance of the popular belief that this is precisely the stage when fatigue and injury issues narrow gaps in class, talent and ambition. To Arsenal's detriment.

Conversely, the Gunners had been outstanding in the first half of a season in which they played their best football and put a commanding stamp not only on the Champions League group stage but on the Premier League. Only then were they stressed to dig deep in the Premier League (won for the first time since 2004), in the FA Cup (lost in the quarter-finals), in the League Cup (lost in the final) and ultimately in Europe (lost to the last kick).

PSG duly ended their European season as they had begun it, carrying off a trophy by defeating a North London team in a penalty shootout; this one far more important than the teasing denial of Tottenham Hotspur in the UEFA Super Cup.

Gabriel was the Arsenal player who cracked at the last, shooting their fifth

Opener...Kai Havertz sends the ball into the roof of the PSG net

penalty over the bar to incur a 4-3 shootout defeat after the 1-1 extra-time stalemate. Here was the cruellest blow for a central defender who had been by far his team's outstanding player; without his defensive resilience they would not even have ended normal time on terms, let alone extra-time.

Arsenal thus lost a third European final in a shootout. Gabriel succumbed to the same last-miss agonies as Graham Rix against Valencia in the Cup Winners' Cup in 1980 and Patrick Vieira against Galatasaray in the UEFA Cup in 2000.

PSG earned the turnaround by refusing to be panicked by the Gunners' opener in the sixth minute. They were far from their most fluent best but played positively and persistently, dominated 76% of the possession and restricted Arsenal to one single sixth-minute shot on target in the entire 120 minutes.

That shot was sparked by an attempted break down the left and a Marquinhos clearance which rebounded off Leandro Trossard to send Kai Havertz running clear to shoot up into the roof of the nest past an immobile Matvey Safonov, a goalkeeper frozen like a rabbit in the German's headlights.

Subsequently Arsenal did well, courtesy of their organisation and magnificent discipline, to hold out for an hour. But protecting a sixth-minute lead in this era of hydration breaks, multiple substitutions and "real" stoppage time is too much to ask.

Initially, double-marking contained Khvicha Kvaratskhelia while Martin Odegaard obediently sacrificed his creative instincts to block out Vitinha before Cristhian Mosquera felled the Georgian winger and Ousmane Dembele slammed home the penalty. Ironically, more than an hour later the Gunners, having not conceded a penalty all season domestically, were overturned by six on one night.

This was PSG's third trophy of the campaign on penalties, after the UEFA Super Cup and the French Champions Trophy. All these add to a fifth successive Ligue 1 success.

Of course, many of the assessments from the Puskas Arena in Budapest noted the 15-year funding of some $2.3 billion by Qatar Sports Investments, including the transfer missteps with Neymar and Lionel Messi. They found the answer in choosing the right coach and keeping the faith.

Luis Enrique rebuilt his PSG squad on the right principles, wise selection and finely-judged rotation to keep his men fit and fresh. All ten of the outfield players who started PSG's victory over Internazionale last year were back to see off Arsenal.

Clumsy...Cristhian Mosquera brings down Khvicha Kvaratskhelia

Not for PSG the fatigue-ridden fate of Chelsea who had comprehensively beaten them 3-0 in the FIFA Club World Cup final last summer.

To win the Champions League twice in a row is an achievement matching only Real Madrid in the competition's modern era. Given Luis Enrique's intensity, matching *Los Blancos*' hat-trick run under Zinedine Zidane is not beyond them; assuming PSG can hold onto the Spaniard amid the managerial turmoil which always follows a World Cup.

> Paris Saint-Germain were far from their most fluent best but played positively and persistently

Keir Radnedge

Decisive...Gabriel fires his penalty over the crossbar

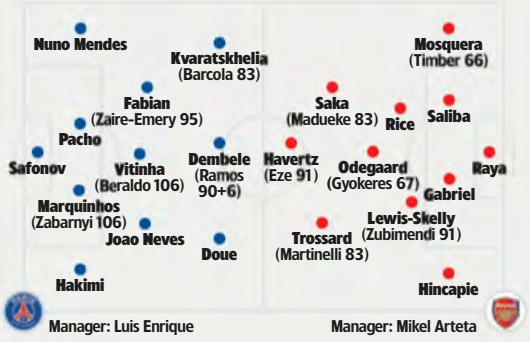
2026 CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL

May 29 – Puskas Arena, Budapest

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN (Dembele 65 pen) 1

ARSENAL (Havertz 6) 1

AET; PSG win 4-3 on pens *HT: 0-1* *Ref: Daniel Siebert*



WHAT THEY SAID

LUIS ENRIQUE
(PSG manager)
"We knew Arsenal would test our tactical discipline from the opening whistle. Going down a goal so early could have broken a lesser team, but our players maintained their composure, found the equaliser, and executed perfectly when the pressure was at its highest in the shootout. This trophy belongs to the collective effort of this club."

Third Champions League... Luis Enrique

OUSMANE DEMBELE
(PSG goalscorer)
"When I stepped up to take the penalty in regulation time, I shut out the noise of the stadium and focused entirely on the ball. We stayed united even when things looked difficult early on. Winning this tournament has been our main objective all season, and bringing this trophy back to Paris is a dream come true."

MIKEL ARTETA
(Arsenal manager)
"To lose a final on penalties is always a cruel way to end a magnificent journey. We started the match exactly how we planned, and Kai's early goal gave us the perfect platform. I cannot fault the execution, desire or bravery of my players tonight. We stood toe-to-toe with a world-class team but football can be decided by the narrowest of margins."

Beaten finalist ...Mikel Arteta

KAI HAVERTZ
(Arsenal goalscorer)
"Scoring so early in a Champions League final is a moment I will always remember but individual moments mean very little when you don't lift the trophy at the end of the night. We gave everything we had on that pitch over 120 minutes. It hurts deeply but we will learn from this experience and return stronger next season."

EMERY'S VILLA MAKE HISTORY

Villans taste European glory again for the first time since 1982

Opening goal...Youri Tielemans struck first with a crisp volley

Unai Emery extended his incredible Europa League record by winning the competition for the fifth time, with Aston Villa being the third club he has taken to victory. That further extended the record he possessed for this and the UEFA Cup, stretching two ahead of Giovanni Trapattoni.

Having previously gone without continental football since 2010-11, this was now the Villans' third consecutive season in a UEFA competition. They had already shown their ability to reach the latter stages in that time, falling to Olympiacos in the Conference League semi-finals and Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League quarter-finals, but this was their chance to lift a trophy.

Their first win in any competition this term came in the Europa League, when a sweet John McGinn strike was the difference between them and Bologna. Consecutive trips to the Netherlands followed with differing results, as they beat Feyenoord before suffering their only defeat of the league phase against Go Ahead Eagles.

Maccabi Tel Aviv, Young Boys, Basel and Fenerbahce were all defeated before a special end to the league phase. After Red Bull Salzburg had gone 2-0 up, Morgan Rogers and Tyrone Mings responded to set the scene for Jamaldeen Jimoh-Aloba to finish from fellow academy graduate Kadan Young's pass and score his first-ever Villa goal. That saw them finish second in the league phase, only trailing Lyon on goal difference while finishing four points ahead of fellow finalists Freiburg.

Emery's side was equally imperious in the knockout stages, conceding just two goals in matches against Lille, Bologna and Nottingham Forest and recording two 4-0 victories. One of those goals conceded came without an immediate response in the semi-final, as Forest emerged from the

Europa League winners...Aston Villa captain John McGinn lifts the trophy

first leg of an all-Premier League tie 1-0 ahead, but there was an emphatic turnaround on an unforgettable night at Villa Park where they simply blew the opposition away.

They looked to do just that to Freiburg in the final in Istanbul with Rogers testing Noah Atubolu inside two minutes, before Nicolas Hofler dragged an attempt wide at the other end.

There was an early flurry of yellow cards too, perhaps offering an insight into how much this occasion meant for both sets of players. This was Freiburg's first-ever European final, and Villa's first since 1982.

It took over half an hour for the Bundesliga outfit to record their first shot on target, a Johan Manzambi shot from range, but Villa looked the more threatening team as McGinn and Rogers had a shot apiece blocked.

The Villans eventually made the breakthrough in the 41st minute when a short corner routine culminated in Rogers crossing to Youri Tielemans, who sent a sumptuous volley fizzing past Atubolu's outstretched hand.

Emi Buendia then produced a special finish of his own with seconds of the first half remaining, collecting McGinn's pass on the edge of the box and curling a sensational strike into the top corner.

Freiburg had already shown their grit to reach this stage, recovering from first-leg defeats in both the round of 16 and the semi-final. But this time they only had 45 minutes to recover rather than a full 90, and their opponents were proving too much for them to deal with.

Villa's evening got even better just before the hour mark. Having scored his side's second, Buendia was the creator as he worked space from Lukas Kubler and drilled the ball into the six-yard box for Europa League Player of the Season Rogers to turn it home.

The margin could have been even larger for the Premier League outfit. Amadou Onana hit the post with a header, Buendia had a rare lapse of concentration as he dinked a shot into the side netting at the end of a slick move, before McGinn saw a side-footed shot saved.

That mattered little as McGinn hoisted aloft Villa's first major trophy since the League Cup in 1996.

There were also some interesting individual records set: Jadon Sancho became the first player to appear in three European finals in three competitions in as many years, while Tammy Abraham became only the second player to lift the Champions League, Europa League and Conference League trophies.

The result was also a mark of the Premier League's dominance, with back-to-back English winners of this trophy for the first time since Tottenham Hotspur and Liverpool in 1972 and 1973 respectively.

For Freiburg, being involved in this match is an undoubted sign of progress for a club that had never previously made it past the last 16 of a European competition and has played in only one German Cup final.

Danny Lewis

Player of the Tournament...Morgan Rogers pokes home Villa's third goal

> Unai Emery's Aston Villa were imperious in the knockout stages, conceding just two goals and recording two 4-0 victories

Europa League specialist...Unai Emery has now won this competition a record five times

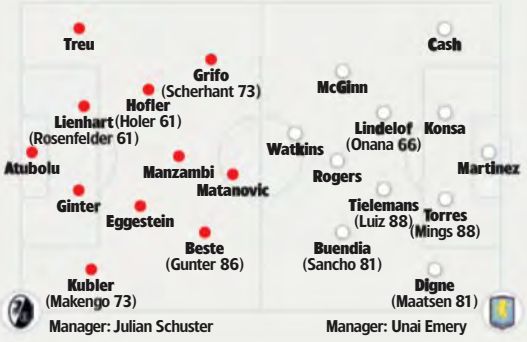
2026 EUROPA LEAGUE FINAL

May 20 – Besiktas Stadium, Istanbul

FREIBURG 0

ASTON VILLA 3
(Tielemans 41, Buendia 45+3, Rogers 58)

HT: 2-0 Ref: Francois Letexier



WHAT THEY SAID

JULIAN SCHUSTER
(Freiburg manager)
"Right now, there is no happiness. We lost a final. That hurts. I said before the game, we came into this believing we could win. For 40 minutes we did well, and then it changed.

"It didn't go our way in the end, and in a few days we will appreciate what we achieved with our fans, but it's painful right now."

Beaten finalist... Julian Schuster

NOAH ATUBOLU
(Freiburg goalkeeper)
"We can be proud of how far we've come. At the same time, though, we're also disappointed today. Huge respect to all the fans who were here supporting us today. The atmosphere was excellent."

UNAI EMERY
(Aston Villa manager)
"All the times I am successful in this competition I needed good players. Now I am so thankful for the players, they are following our ambitions. They are protagonists on the field. This is the reason I am not feeling the king in this competition. I am feeling really thankful – we are the kings together. After 1982 the club won the European Cup, it was something they were missing – the supporters – a trophy. Achieving this one is making us so, so happy – but we are not going to stop."

JOHN McGINN
(Aston Villa captain)
"Tonight was everything we built coming together. The pride I felt with ten minutes to go, knowing we were about to be champions – I can't describe it. It means a lot. As a kid growing up, I remember Celtic in 2003 [losing the UEFA Cup to Porto]. It wasn't a great night for them, but it was special. I was lucky enough to go to the final at Hampden in 2007. To be here, in 2026, as captain of Aston Villa is incredible. It's the proudest night of my career."

Villa legend... John McGinn

GLASNER SIGNS OFF IN STYLE

Outgoing Austrian manager gives Crystal Palace fans another unforgettable night in his last game in charge

First European honour...captain Dean Henderson lifts the Conference League trophy

As Crystal Palace and Rayo Vallecano stepped onto the pitch at the Red Bull Arena in Leipzig, the tension was palpable. It was the first European final in the history of both clubs and the talk among supporters outside the stadium reflected the magnitude of the moment, with both sets of fans eyeing a historic triumph.

That tension carried onto the pitch, with neither side managing a shot on target during the opening half-hour. Shortly before half-time, Tyrick Mitchell had a golden opportunity to break the deadlock after a clever pass from Adam Wharton, but his header drifted wide.

The decisive moment arrived in the 51st minute. After a surging run through the middle, Wharton forced a save from Rayo Vallecano goalkeeper Augusto Batalla. The rebound fell kindly to Jean-Philippe Mateta, who calmly converted to score what proved to be the winning goal, and celebrated with his iconic kick to the corner flag.

Shortly afterwards, Yeremy Pino came close to doubling Palace's advantage when his free-kick struck the post. Rayo Vallecano pushed hard in search of an equaliser, but it never came. Palace held firm before celebrating a historic triumph, with their Austrian manager Oliver Glasner sliding across the turf amid scenes of jubilation among his squad and staff.

It is a sight that Palace fans have become accustomed to, following success in last year's FA Cup final and the Community Shield. Yet the season had been anything but straightforward.

Back in May 2025, the Eagles were celebrating their FA Cup victory over Manchester City and preparing for a Europa League campaign – until UEFA intervened. The club was found to be in breach of multi-club ownership regulations with US businessman John Textor holding stakes in both Palace and Lyon, who had also qualified for the Europa League. As a result, and after an unsuccessful appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, Palace were demoted to the Conference League.

In August, Glasner guided Palace to victory over Premier League champions Liverpool in the Community Shield, but that did little to ease the turmoil surrounding the club. The Austrian publicly criticised Palace's transfer policy after the sale of talismanic playmaker Eberechi Eze to Arsenal. His discontent

Decisive...Mateta scores Palace's winner

Heratbroken...Rayo Vallecano fans after their team's defeat

continued and, when the club accepted an offer from Manchester City for club captain Marc Guehi in January, Glasner announced that he would leave at the end of the season.

Yet with his future resolved, Glasner and his players were able to concentrate on the task at hand. The Austrian, who had never coached or played in England before arriving at Selhurst Park, departs as the club's most successful manager of all time with three pieces of silverware to his name.

The Conference League triumph also secured Palace a place in next season's Europa League, meaning that England will have nine representatives in European competition next season, matching the record set in 2025-26.

As two clubs from capital city suburbs punching above their weight with fiercely proud fanbases, there were plenty of similarities between the two finalists. Yet Palace's Premier League riches meant there was a huge gulf in resources between them. Since returning to La Liga in 2021, Rayo Vallecano have spent around €50 million in transfer fees; in January, Palace spent close to that figure on Jorgen Strand Larsen alone, a player who didn't even start the final.

Operating with one of the smallest budgets in La Liga, playing at a humble stadium and training facilities, and maintaining a deep connection to their Vallecas neighbourhood, Rayo Vallecano's journey to the final was among the most compelling stories of the European season. The club is a true throwback; they don't sell tickets online, which meant that fans had to queue for hours at the ground in order to make it to Leipzig.

The head coach, Inigo Perez, first joined as an assistant to former manager Andoni Iraola, and would have followed him to Bournemouth if he hadn't been denied a work permit. Instead Perez stayed in Vallecas, eventually taking over in February 2024 and continuing the team's progress. Like Glasner, though, this was his final game in charge, with the 38-year-old appointed by Villarreal ahead of the new season.

For Glasner, it was the perfect goodbye. "He has got to be one of the best managers Crystal Palace have ever had," said influential midfielder Wharton, who might also have played his last game for the club amid rumours of big-money bids in the summer. Mateta, the scorer of the winning goal in Leipzig, almost left in January before a move to Milan collapsed at the last moment. Farewells never seem far away at Crystal Palace, and a second consecutive European campaign will provide another test of the club's ambition.

> Glasner departs as Crystal Palace's most successful manager of all time with three pieces of silverware to his name

Lukas Vrablik

Bowing out... Glasner says goodbye to the Palace fans

2026 CONFERENCE LEAGUE FINAL

May 27 – Red Bull Arena, Leipzig

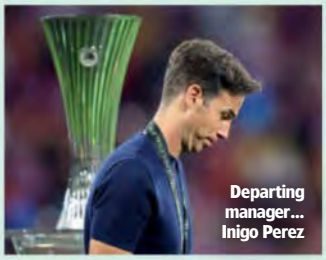
CRYSTAL PALACE (Mateta 51)	1
RAYO VALLECANO	0

HT: 0-0 Ref: Maurizio Mariani

WHAT THEY SAID

INIGO PEREZ
(Ray Vallecano manager)
"These are difficult times for everyone. We just have to get through it however we can. What breaks you inside is seeing people cry. It absolutely destroys you. You feel that sadness and frustration of defeat, of the explosion of happiness that winning it would have meant, and it leaves you frustrated.

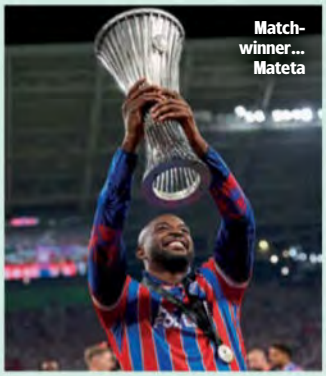
"It was not the game that we imagined, that we all had in our heads. But I prefer to think that it wasn't down to us, but it was down to them being better. They're deserved winners."



Departing manager... Inigo Perez

OLIVER GLASNER
(Crystal Palace manager)
"I took a deep breath with the final whistle. I just supported this group of players – I could be the best magician but without the players, it wouldn't work. The players deserve all the credit because they have to trust me and work very hard. They will all tell you I'm very demanding. But they know I want the best for everyone. As soon as everyone understood that, we created a fantastic spirit and the supporters now have what they deserve with a spot in the Europa League."

JEAN-PHILIPPE MATETA
(Crystal Palace goalscorer)
"I feel fantastic! I feel fantastic! We did it! First time in Europe, we did it! Now I just want to celebrate, I just want to party. It's incredible. We did everything. I told you about the intensity we're going to put in. I'm tired right now. I gave everything."



Match-winner... Mateta

From Invincibles to Unbreakables

After three silver medals in a row, Arsenal return to the Premier League summit for the first time since 2003-04

It was the year of the unexpected in the Premier League. Few thought Arsenal could bridge the gap from second to first, which had seemed such a chasm in the previous three seasons. An avalanche of doubts and derision swept towards them. They were criticised for being over-reliant on set-pieces, for slowing down the game and playing the percentages. The team's character was questioned. A cocky Manchester City supporter pretended to drink from an Arsenal-branded water bottle, interpreted as drinking Arsenal tears. To kill the mocking barbs, Gunners boss Mikel Arteta instilled pure defiance in his team and ended their agonising 22-year wait for the title.

After Arsenal's Invincibles of 2003-04, here were the Unbreakables. David Raya was a wall in front of goal. William Saliba and Gabriel manned the barricades in front of him. Declan Rice put in the hard yards from box to box, fighting hard and driving the team forward. It was not pretty but it was effective. The medals justified the means. They need to entertain more next season but with the monkey finally off their back of winning a major trophy, the shackles may well be released.

Fond farewell...Pep Guardiola said goodbye to the Premier League after leaving Manchester City

The surprises continued with Pep Guardiola leaving Manchester City a year early. He'd built another team full of young talent, like Nico O'Reilly, Abdukodir Khusanov and Rayan Cherki, yet a decade in the gruelling English football factory drained him.

Across Manchester, United lost their way under Ruben Amorim. The Red Devils needed an old friend, an old player in Michael Carrick, to get them back on track, emotionally and tactically. Bruno Fernandes' eye for the right pass broke opposition defences and the Premier League assists record. The next challenge is to reproduce next season in tandem with European football.

Aston Villa surprised a few in finishing fourth, and briefly looking like title challengers, although not within the club. Unai Emery drove standards and the likes of Morgan Rogers and John McGinn particularly responded.

Defending champions Liverpool surrendered their title with scarcely a fight and slumped to fifth. They looked to have bought superbly but Alexander Isak was too often injured, Hugo Ekitike started well but eventually damaged his ACL, and Florian Wirtz looked a little boy lost in the fray when so often he has run games for Germany. Arne Slot lost the fans, lost further credibility when Mohamed Salah questioned the style of football, and ultimately lost his job.

The tales of the unexpected were written most expressively by the middle orders. Well-run "B" teams alarmed the A-listers. Bournemouth sold £250 million worth of talent but shook the establishment with their pressing, irrepressible counter-attacking and continued savvy recruitment. Andoni Iraola inspired them so much that they finished sixth and Liverpool came calling. Brighton & Hove Albion kept the faith in the inexperienced but quietly impressive Fabian Hurzeler, found a perfect attacking blend match in Jack Hinshelwood and Danny Welbeck, and got into Europe via eighth. Brentford's

Star man...Arsenal hero Declan Rice kisses the Premier League trophy

THE BREAKDOWN

TEAM OF THE SEASON

CUP FINALS

Not a memorable game but a memorable defining moment: Antoine Semenyo's flicked finish from Erling Haaland's cross against Chelsea deservedly won the FA Cup final. It was Pep Guardiola's last trophy at **Manchester City**, adding to the League Cup final victory over Arsenal back in March.

EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS

Familiar faces make the Champions League: **Arsenal**, **Man City**, **Man United**, **Aston Villa** and **Liverpool**. Tales of the unexpected in the Europa League: **Bournemouth** and **Sunderland**, who got into Europe for the first time since 1973, along with **Crystal Palace** (via their Conference League triumph). **Brighton** will hope to repeat that feat.

RELEGATED AND PROMOTED TEAMS

West Ham United endured calamity in defence and gravity in the table; **Burnley** were all huff, no potency; **Wolves** stayed bottom all season. Vibrant **Coventry City** returned to the top flight for the first time in 25 years, followed by **Ipswich Town** and **Hull City**, the real winners from the Spygate scandal.

ninth place was just reward for their gamble in appointing Keith Andrews, and for their continued smart recruitment with Igor Thiago prolific.

In amongst the Bs were Sunderland. Tipped for relegation, they ended up seventh – the best performance by a newly promoted club since Ipswich Town in 2000-01 – and in Europe thanks to the expertise of their head coach Regis Le Bris and their clever recruitment, especially Granit Xhaka as a reference and distribution point.

> After Arsenal's Invincibles of 2003-04, here were the Unbreakables. It was not pretty but it was effective. The medals justified the means

Without the goals of Joao Pedro, Chelsea's season would have been even worse than tenth. Enzo Maresca saw the problem with a recruitment strategy that prioritised promise over readiness and left. The job was too soon and too big for Liam Rosenior. Owners Clearlake eventually saw sense, acknowledged the need for experience, promised to modify their buying and appointed Xabi Alonso as manager. It's a coup.

Fulham continued to punch above their weight, thanks to Marco Silva, who continued to gain admiring glances from other clubs before duly being appointed by Benfica in his native Portugal.

Newcastle United spent £120m on a strikeforce that should have clicked: Nick Woltemade using those clever feet to thread passes through to the pacy finisher Yoane Wissa. Wissa's injury issues stymied that. A sense of drift pervaded St James' Park especially with concerns over the commitment levels of their Saudi owners, while Eddie Howe needs a doubt-dispelling start to next season.

Everton, 13th, achieved the expected in the safe hands of David Moyes: mid-table respectability, and with Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall and James Garner shining. Everton still need a reliable striker and a little more ambition.

Leeds United defied gloomy expectations thanks to Dominic Calvert-Lewin's fitness and goals, Daniel Farke's shift to a back three and that impassioned support.

Crystal Palace survived a mid-season civil war when Oliver Glasner criticised the board but peace was brokered, a good finish ensued, and Adam Wharton continued to dazzle with his elegant midfield play.

Nottingham Forest were again entertained by the brilliance of Elliot Anderson and Morgan Gibbs-White and settled by manager Vitor Pereira ending the churn in the dugout.

Tottenham Hotspur found themselves scrapping in the relegation zone – and scrapping doesn't come easily to this squad. After struggling all season, Roberto De Zerbi arrived just in time. The rebuild is already underway.

West Ham United were riddled with tension, between fans and owners, and with nerves and chaos infecting their defence; Burnley lacked goals and directness; toothless Wolves proved lambs to the slaughter.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Declan Rice. Arsenal's driving force. His "it's not done" defiance after defeat at Manchester City set the tone. Martin Odegaard has the captain's armband but Rice has the command. Box-to-box energy, covering back and charging forward, Rice also offered a threat from in-swinging corners, free-kicks and throw-ins.

COACH OF THE SEASON
Mikel Arteta. Loved by Arsenal fans for building a team of great resilience and bringing a first title in 22 years. Disliked by many rival fans for his self-confidence, antics in and outside the technical area, and his team's over-reliance on set-pieces. Arteta certainly stirs jealousy. He's a winner. Now he'll demand more.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Rayan Cherki. Manchester City's French magician brought old-school dribbling arts back to the English game. Cherki relies on touch and changes of direction to spirit the ball past opponents. In a season not high on technical verve, Cherki's runs lifted levels.

Title winner... Mikel Arteta

Barca best in Spain, Real in disarray

The 2025-26 season saw a clear gap open up between Spain's two biggest clubs

If there was an illustration of Barcelona's grip on La Liga, sealing the title against arch-rivals Real Madrid with a 2-0 scoreline in their reopened Camp Nou was as picture-perfect as it could be. It was a crossing of the finishing line even sweeter than that against local rivals Espanyol in 2025.

Once again, this multi-faceted Barca side set the standards. Having already installed discipline, a daring high-line in defence, and a dose more energy, head coach Hansi Flick saw his team win all of their league home games en route to glory.

Beyond the smoothness associated with the *Blaugrana*, there was a more ruthless edge – more willingness to shoot from distance, and a greater ability to grind out ugly victories. Flick also repackaged Manchester United struggler Marcus Rashford into an attacking dynamo to complement the likes of Pedri, Dani Olmo, Lamine Yamal and now-departed talisman Robert Lewandowski. Rashford's England team-mate and new signing Anthony Gordon could be the next unlikely hit in 2026-27.

Title winners...Barca players with the trophy

The team adapted and evolved. Raphinha was a sensation in Flick's first title win, but injury kept the Brazil forward out for long spells in the second. Academy graduate Gerard Martin was a possible weak link, yet the German trainer transformed him into a staple in the defence. After strengthening the goalkeeping department, new No.1 Joan Garcia staked his claim to be the finest shot-stopper in the league. From front to back, Flick's men were quite clearly the country's outstanding side.

In sharp contrast, Real Madrid are in a muddle following another second-place finish.

After wowing at Bayer Leverkusen, boss Xabi Alonso couldn't harmonise the assortment of superstars at the Bernabeu. His mid-season replacement, Alvaro Arbeloa, did the best he could in a tough situation, but got off to the worst possible start with an embarrassing Copa del Rey exit against Albacete in his first game. Kylian Mbappe won the top scorer award, but to no collective end.

Los Blancos had entered the season with new impetus: Dean Huijsen, Alvaro Carreras and Trent Alexander-Arnold added to the backline, though they all failed to hold down regular spots – only partly due to injuries. Elsewhere, promising Argentina playmaker Franco Mastantuono's role remains a little unclear after his high-profile move from River Plate. Overall, the squad still lacks the magic of its 15th Champions League triumph two years ago.

Decisive *Clasico*... Barcelona sealed the title with a home win over Real Madrid

Amid the wreckage of another trophyless campaign, infighting and an extraordinary outburst ensued. At a surprise press conference, club president Florentino Perez tore into media and individual journalists, and called on a presidential election.

With 65% of the vote Perez was re-elected ahead of Enrique Riquelme, the first candidate to stand against him

THE BREAKDOWN

TEAM OF THE SEASON

CUP FINAL

Real Sociedad overcame Atletico Madrid on penalties to win the Copa del Rey. It went the distance after an entertaining 2-2 draw, although *La Real's* Ander Barrenetxea took just 14 seconds to head home the earliest ever goal in a Copa final.

EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS

Spain will have five Champions League participants once again. Back after 21 years are **Real Betis**, joining **Barcelona**, **Real Madrid**, **Villarreal** and **Atletico Madrid**. **Celta Vigo** and cup winners **Real Sociedad** head into the Europa League. A Conference League play-off awaits **Getafe**.

RELEGATED AND PROMOTED TEAMS

Real Oviedo lacked sufficient quality and finished bottom. **Girona** came 19th, a dramatic fall having played in the 2024-25 Champions League. **Mallorca** nearly made a great escape on the final day. **Racing Santander** and **Deportivo La Coruna** are back in La Liga, joined by play-off winners **Malaga**.

Mid-season exit...Xabi Alonso departed runners-up Real Madrid in January

since 2006. In the first act of his new mandate, the 79-year-old fulfilled his promise of re-hiring former manager Jose Mourinho.

For nearby Atletico Madrid, the title was never in sight. A slow start hindered their chances as the cup competitions eventually took precedence. Ultimately, the Copa del Rey and Champions League just eluded them, compounding a poor fourth-placed finish.

Diego Simeone is now the longest-serving boss in top-level European football after Frank Schmidt's Heidenheim went down in Germany, and some are finding it hard to feel overly positive about a bright new era with the Argentine – synonymous with the team – still leading the way. One long-serving figure whose time at Atleti did come to an end though was French forward Antoine Griezmann, who left to join MLS outfit Orlando City. Replacing the club's all-time record goalscorer will be a daunting task.

Finishing one position above Atleti in the standings, Villarreal enjoyed another great ride. The side from a town of just over 50,000 people continues to punch above its weight, helped by a well-stocked academy, smart recruitment and a simplified attacking style. The Yellow Submarine has since waved goodbye to Marcelino and hired Inigo Perez from Rayo Vallecano, another talented coach.

Real Betis did well to finish fifth considering their move across Seville to La Cartuja while the Estadio Benito Villamarin undergoes reconstruction. In Sixth, Celta Vigo were slick, with two veterans in 38-year-old former Liverpool striker Iago Aspas and Borja Iglesias, 33, still scoring goals.

Espanyol had a topsy-turvy time, looking good for European qualification, and then tumbling into a survival battle before ending up in mid-table. Typically combative Getafe snuck into seventh, while Athletic Club, despite holding onto Nico Williams last summer, underwhelmed.

The drama came at the bottom, with a clutch of teams risking relegation on the final day. Real Oviedo were already down. Girona, soaring only two years ago, joined them, as did Mallorca, despite old-school centre-forward Vedat Muriqi grabbing 23 goals.

From front to back, Hansi Flick's men were quite clearly the country's outstanding side

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Lamine Yamal is no longer a supporting act but the main man – even as a teenager – at champions Barcelona. Already a serial winner, his combined goals and assists increased, and he's playing with a clarity of thought extremely rare in 18-year-old footballers.

COACH OF THE SEASON
Among those who deserve a shout out is Luis Castro for rescuing Levante from the drop and, of course, title-winning Hansi Flick. However, overachieving in the league while also guiding Rayo Vallecano to a first-ever European final (more on page 56) means that **Inigo Perez** snatches this one.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Much curiosity surrounded **Marcus Rashford**'s loan move from Manchester United to Barca. Could he become the force of old? Yes, and more. A winger by name, he drifted centrally and became a poacher in the box too. A thunderous free-kick in the title-winning clash over Real Madrid capped off the showreel.

Player of the Season ...Lamine Yamal

Inter face down their doubters

Cristian Chivu lifts the *Scudetto* and silences his critics in his first season as manager

From day one in Serie A, all eyes were on Internazionale to see how they would respond after a bitterly disappointing end to the 2024-25 season.

Then, with a potential treble up for grabs, they had lost to local rivals Milan in the Coppa Italia semi-finals, narrowly missed out to Napoli in a dramatic title race and been humbled 5-0 by Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League final. To add insult to injury, they then saw head coach Simone Inzaghi depart for Saudi Arabia.

There were some concerns over the identity of Inzaghi's successor, Inter's former defender and academy coach, Cristian Chivu. The Romanian only had 13 senior games in charge of Parma on his CV and had not been the club's first choice. How, asked his doubters, would he fare against coaches of the calibre of Napoli's Antonio Conte and Milan's Massimiliano Allegri, with 11 Serie A titles between them? When Inter then lost two of their opening three matches, Chivu's credentials were further called into question.

Critics silenced...Inter boss Cristian Chivu

The question was, who would take advantage of Inter's perceived weakness?

Milan also got off to a shaky start, but recovered from their opening-day defeat to newly promoted Cremonese to enjoy a lengthy unbeaten run. Roma, under the former Atalanta head coach Gian Piero Gasperini, also threatened to be contenders early on. They went top after 12 games, but faded around Christmas time.

As the season progressed, Napoli's bid to defend their title was undermined by inconsistent results away from the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona and injuries to key players, including striker Romelu Lukaku, playmaker Kevin De Bruyne and winger David Neres. The latter had been the star of the show in December when Conte's side beat Bologna in Riyadh to lift the Super Cup, but within weeks his season had been ended by an ankle operation.

By then, Inter had built up a real head of steam, ending February on a run of 14 wins in 15 games that had given them a healthy advantage at the top of the table.

For Milan's Allegri, the mantra was consistent: a Champions League place, he claimed, was their only objective. Yet when his team completed the double over Inter in March, the gap between the derby rivals was down to seven points and talk of a genuine title race was rekindled. But a startling collapse in form thereafter would cost the *Rossoneri* dearly.

Serie A champions ...Lautaro Martinez lifts the *Scudetto*

By overcoming Como in April in a seven-goal thriller, Inter effectively put the title beyond any of their rivals' reach. Another victory, against Chivu's former club Parma no less, sparked joyous celebrations at the San Siro. Inter's 21st *Scudetto* – and their third in six years – was confirmed with three games still to play.

The head coach, who was swiftly rewarded with a new contract, said the disappointment of the previous season had spurred the team on.

"I am happy for this group, the boys,

THE BREAKDOWN

TEAM OF THE SEASON

CUP FINAL
Inter completed a stunning league and cup double for the third time in their history by beating Lazio 2-0 in the Coppa Italia final at the Stadio Olimpico. An Adam Marusic own goal followed by a close-range finish by captain Lautaro Martinez ensured the club's tenth Coppa – only Juventus have won more.

EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS
By finishing third behind **Inter** and **Napoli**, **Roma** return to the Champions League after a seven-year absence. They will be joined by European debutants **Como**, who were fourth. **Juventus** and **Milan** head into the Europa League, while **Atalanta** will make their Conference League debut.

RELEGATED AND PROMOTED TEAMS
Hellas Verona ended a seven-season stay in Serie A, while **Pisa** made an immediate return to Italy's second tier. Jamie Vardy, relegated from the Premier League at Leicester City last year, went down again with **Cremonese**. **Venezia**, **Frosinone** and **Monza** will replace them.

Story of the season...Cesc Fabregas led Como to fourth place and the Champions League

the club and the fans who supported us from the beginning and had to suffer the narrative of last year," Chivu told *La Stampa*. "The boys were great at rolling up their sleeves and finding the right motivation to have a competitive season."

Inter finished 11 points ahead of second-placed Napoli, with whom Conte parted company once the season was over, and 14 ahead of third-placed Roma.

On a dramatic final day, Milan's drop-off in form – they lost six of their last ten games – saw them slip out of the top four altogether; 24 hours later, Allegri and the club's entire senior management team were shown the door.

> How, asked Cristian Chivu's doubters, would he fare against coaches of the calibre of Napoli's Antonio Conte and Milan's Massimiliano Allegri?

The other high-profile casualties in the race for the Champions League places were Juventus. After a poor start, which cost coach Igor Tudor his job, ex-Napoli boss Luciano Spalletti appeared to have steadied the ship and be steering the team towards a top-four finish. But a surprise home defeat in their penultimate game – to a Fiorentina side that had only narrowly avoided relegation – proved to be fatal.

Next season will be the first since the Champions League was rebranded in 1992 in which neither Milan nor Juventus will feature.

With some of the bigger clubs underperforming, the door was left ajar for a smaller side to emerge, and Como duly barged through to provide the season's most uplifting story.

Thanks to an outstanding second half of the campaign, Cesc Fabregas' side pipped both Juve and Milan to the fourth and final Champions League place.

The achievement came just two years after Como had won promotion to the top division and seven after playing semi-professionally in Serie D, Italy's fourth tier.

"It's been a special, historic season in the club's history," Fabregas said. "When I arrived four years ago as a player, we changed in a bar before training – today we're in the Champions League. It's been a superb team effort."

Only Inter scored more goals than Como, who also boasted the meanest defence in Serie A. In Europe's five major leagues, only Arsenal let in fewer than the 29 they conceded.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Alongside his seven goals in Inter's title pursuit, left wing-back **Federico Dimarco** broke the Serie A record for the number of assists in a season. In total, he set up 18 goals – twice as many as any other player in Italy's top division.

COACH OF THE SEASON
Inter's league and cup double was a personal triumph for **Cristian Chivu**, whose lack of Serie A experience initially cast doubts over his credentials. He is the first Inter head coach since Jose Mourinho in 2008-09 to win the *Scudetto* in his first season in charge.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
In a swap deal that saw Leon Bailey return to Aston Villa, Dutchman **Donyell Malen** arrived at Roma in the January transfer window. The Netherlands forward's 14 goals in 18 games were key to Gian Piero Gasperini's side sealing qualification for the Champions League.

Coppa Italia final hero...Inter skipper Lautaro Martinez

PSG too good for Ligue 1

Luis Enrique's side lift another French title without breaking a sweat

Kylian Mbappe's departure from Paris Saint-Germain two summers ago left Ligue 1 rivals smelling blood, but since then Luis Enrique's side have provided the most emphatic of responses.

Last summer, there appeared little change of PSG's dominance coming to an end, but that didn't prevent their closest challengers showing ambition in their summer transfer dealings. The likes of Paul Pogba, Ansu Fati and Eric Dier came in at Monaco, while Marseille, back in the Champions League, had one of the most highly-rated managers in Europe in the form of Roberto De Zerbi. The club had spent big in order to tailor the squad to his needs, and when OM beat PSG in a league game at the Velodrome for the first time since 2011 back in September, a title battle, everyone hoped, was afoot.

It was not to be. This was a season in which PSG's most realistic challengers fell by the wayside; both Monaco and Marseille ended up finishing outside the top four, with De Zerbi departing in February. Another contender, Lens, emerged but were kept at arm's length, in part thanks to the league itself, who now pander to the European champions' every whim in a desperate attempt to bolster their Champions League prospects. With back-to-back continental titles in the bag, you have to say that it is working.

De Zerbi's disappointment...Marseille's expected title challenge failed to materialise

But questions should be asked of the LFP's strategy. As well as postponing PSG's game against Nantes in March in order to aid their preparations for a tie with Chelsea, a match against Lens, scheduled for April 11, was sacrificed in order to help PSG progress against Liverpool. At the time, it was a potential title decider, the likes of which are rarely seen in the era of QSI dominance. Against Lens' wishes, the game was postponed and rescheduled to take place ahead of the final gameweek. By the time it came around, there was nothing riding on it. "We are already 99.9% champions," said Luis Enrique pre-match. Predictably, the title was wrapped up on Lens' turf.

Luis Enrique didn't even celebrate post-match. A simple "I told you so," sufficed, and the title celebrations were low-key. The last game of the season was a trip to next-door neighbours Paris FC, who denied LFP's request to host the Ligue 1 trophy presentation after the game. Instead, they had to make do with a small stand in front of the PSG away fans before kick-off. No fireworks, just a simple lifting of the trophy and onto more important things; a striking snapshot of how PSG, borderline contemptuously, approach Ligue 1 these days.

Indeed, the stars of their Champions League triumph have rarely been seen in Ligue 1. Four of their five most regular league starters didn't start the final against Arsenal. Vitinha has been central to all of PSG's success, but Ousmane Dembele, for example, started just 11 league games, as did club captain Marquinhos. Nuno Mendes, Joao Neves and Fabian Ruiz, all starters in the final, started just 13. For Dembele and Fabian, injuries have played their part, but their absence in domestic affairs attests to the chasm between PSG and the rest of Ligue 1.

Dominant... influential midfielder Vitinha lifts the Ligue 1 trophy

THE BREAKDOWN

TEAM OF THE SEASON

CUP FINAL

Lens clinched their first-ever French Cup thanks to a win over Nice, whose focus was firmly on their upcoming relegation play-off. It wasn't easy for Pierre Sage's side, despite them being the overwhelming favourite, but the 3-1 victory in Saint-Denis nonetheless crowned a historic season for Lens.

EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS

PSG and **Lens** were a class apart, but the fight for the final automatic Champions League place went to the final day. **Lille** clinched it, despite defeat, with **Lyon** and **Rennes** failing to capitalise. The former will go through the CL qualifiers, the latter will compete in the Europa League alongside **Marseille**, with **Monaco** in the Conference League.

RELEGATED AND PROMOTED TEAMS

Nice remained in the top flight by the skin of their teeth, beating Saint-Etienne in the play-off. The latter remain in Ligue 2, joined by yo-yo side **Metz** and fallen giant **Nantes**. City Football Group side **Troyes** come up with **Le Mans**, propelled by a new leadership group that includes Novak Djokovic and Thibaut Courtois (more on page 44).

Over-achievers...Lens finished second thanks to signings like Odsonne Edouard

Luis Enrique has used the league as a laboratory to test out prototypes that, by and large, he has not rolled out in Europe: defender Lucas Beraldo has played in midfield, full-back Nuno Mendes at left wing, winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia as a No.9, and others.

There have been varying degrees of success, and, when called upon, as they regularly have been, those "depth" options often failed to impress. But that proved inconsequential.

PSG's most realistic challengers fell by the wayside; both Monaco and Marseille ended up outside the top four, while Lens were kept at arm's length

Lens were never expected to be title challengers. Even as spring approached, their head coach Pierre Sage spoke of succeeding in his mission to keep the club in the top flight.

Their success can be attributed to the incredible work done by sporting director Jean-Louis Leca in the transfer window. Mamadou Sangare, Florian Thauvin, Samson Baidoo, Robin Risser, Matthieu Udol, Odsonne Edouard...the transfer window was all hits and no misses. It was a historic season, capped by a maiden triumph in the French Cup.

Still, it was not enough to dethrone PSG and will be hugely difficult to replicate next season. Many of the aforementioned players have been linked with exits, top performers Adrien Thomasson and Malang Sarr are both out of contract and set to leave, while manager Sage has moved on to Crystal Palace. Even Leca candidly admitted: "We aren't a Champions League club...if people expect Lens to do better than last season, I will say it openly, we will not do better."

PSG disinterestedly and ambivalently strode to a fifth consecutive league title, helped to it by the financial and power imbalances that have put paid to any semblance of competition in Ligue 1, fair or otherwise. There is a status quo, and it doesn't look like being challenged any time soon.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Former PSG midfielder Blaise Matuidi has backed **Vitinha** to win the Ballon d'Or, and for his sheer consistency over the past three seasons, he deserves it. As he has done ever since Luis Enrique's arrival, Vitinha has run PSG's midfield, leading them to back-to-back UCL titles.

COACH OF THE SEASON
Harshly shunted by Lyon the previous season, **Pierre Sage** proved his worth at Lens. A mid-table finish was touted, but he defied expectations, leading the club back into the Champions League and winning the first French Cup in the club's history. Dino Toppmoller has a very hard act to follow.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Before joining Strasbourg, **Joaquin Panichelli** was playing in Spain's second tier. The Argentine set Ligue 1 alight, netting 16 goals, working his way into the Argentina squad, and displacing soon-to-be-Chelsea forward Emmanuel Emegha. An untimely ACL injury ended his World Cup dreams and Golden Boot chances.

Cup winners... Lens lift the trophy

Bayern blow the Bundesliga away

Vincent Kompany's side were too good for the rest of Germany once again

Bayern Munich, past masters of extinguishing suspense in Bundesliga title races, made light work of recording their 13th *Schale* (the silver championship shield) in the last 14 years.

Setting the tone on the opening day of the campaign with a 6-0 demolition of RB Leipzig, the Bavarians were never to relinquish top spot, only beaten once in the entire season (a shock 2-1 home loss to Augsburg in January), amassing a record-breaking 122 goals and eventually finishing a whopping 16 points ahead of runners-up Borussia Dortmund who, despite becoming much harder to beat under coach Niko Kovac, just could not keep pace.

So much for equality. Bayern's final tally of 89 points was 24 more than third-placed RB Leipzig and 27 more than Stuttgart, the fourth and last of the Champions League qualifiers.

Bayern were not without their flaws – particularly vulnerable to extreme pace – but it made little difference. With their outstanding front three of Harry Kane, Michael Olise and Luis Diaz supplying no fewer than 66 top-flight goals between them (109 in all competitions), they were brimming over with firepower. Bayern's brand of inventive attacking football was truly a spectacle to behold, and even on their rare off-days their grit and hunger would be enough to pull them back from the edge, the never-say-die spirit exemplified by central midfield dynamo and skipper Joshua Kimmich.

Astutely set up by coach Vincent Kompany, a leader of natural authority and excellent communication skills, Bayern simply never knew when to take their foot off the gas. Only a week after clinching the title in mid-April – doing so with four rounds of the season remaining – they still went gunning for maximum points, sensationally turning a three-goal half-time deficit against Mainz into a 4-3 away win.

"We already were champions and may have settled for a 3-0 or 3-1 defeat. But that was not the case," said Kompany proudly afterwards. "At the end, we celebrated like a relegation-threatened club which had saved itself with a victory in the play-offs. I like that."

It says everything about Kompany and his irrepressible band of merry men that they were able to hit such heights of entertainment and effectiveness in a season replete with serious injuries to key players. Brilliant attacking midfielder Jamal Musiala sat out much of the campaign after breaking a leg and dislocating an ankle at the Club World Cup, veteran goalkeeper Manuel Neuer missed much of the springtime action with a torn calf, Canada left-back Alphonso Davies was sidelined for eight months with a ruptured ACL, and Serge Gnabry missed the run-in (and the World Cup) after suffering a torn adductor muscle in his right thigh.

Thanks to their superior economic resources, Bayern had the strength in

History maker... Marie-Louise Eta

THE BREAKDOWN

TEAM OF THE SEASON

David Raum (RB Leipzig)
Luis Diaz (Bayern Munich)
Lukas Vuskovic (Hamburg)
Serge Gnabry (Bayern Munich)
Gregor Kobel (Dortmund)
Joshua Kimmich (Bayern Munich)
Harry Kane (Bayern Munich)
Jeff Chabot (Stuttgart)
Michael Olise (Bayern Munich)
Konrad Laimer (Bayern Munich)
Yan Diomande (RB Leipzig)

CUP FINAL

As opportunistic as ever, Harry Kane netted a second-half hat-trick as **Bayern Munich** saw off Stuttgart 3-0 to complete a league and cup double. This was Bayern's 21st German Cup triumph and their first in the competition since 2019-20.

Hat-trick hero... Harry Kane

Dominant...Joshua Kimmich lifts the Bundesliga *Schale*

Relegated...Wolfsburg lost the relegation play-off

depth to cope, with a string of young prospects seizing the opportunity to make a name for themselves. Neuer's replacement, Jonas Urbig, settled in excellently, attacking-third marvel Lennart Karl duly was rewarded with a place in Germany's World Cup squad (though he later withdrew with a thigh muscle injury of his own), while Tom Bischof, acquired from Hoffenheim in the close season, very much looked the part when filling in at full-back or in midfield.

> With their outstanding front three of Harry Kane, Michael Olise and Luis Diaz, Bayern were brimming over with firepower

At the same time as Kompany was plotting his second consecutive Bundesliga title at the Bayern helm, Marie-Louise Eta was making history in the Union Berlin technical area. Appointed as caretaker boss in late April following the sacking of Steffen Baumgart, Eta, 35, became the first woman to manage in one of the top five European leagues. Cue a torrent of sexist abuse on social media, though it did not appear to bother her, going on to clear-headedly secure survival with a respectable record in her five-match tenure of two wins, one draw, two losses.

Eta, previously a Champions League-winning player with Turbine Potsdam and a coach with Union's Under-19 squad, is due to take charge of the Berlin club's women's side this summer. Mauro Lustrinelli, fresh from guiding Swiss underdogs Thun to a fairy-tale national title (more on page 36), will hold the Union reins in the Bundesliga next season.

After 29 uninterrupted years in the German elite, Wolfsburg suffered the heartbreak of relegation, their fate sealed by a 2-1 aggregate loss to Paderborn (who finished third in the second division) in the play-offs. Bundesliga champions in 2008-09 and Champions League participants as recently as 2021, the Lower Saxony side cut a thoroughly dysfunctional figure for much of the season, especially poor at home, where they won just two of 17 games.

EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS
While **Bayern Munich**, **Dortmund**, **RB Leipzig** and **Stuttgart** earned a ticket to the Champions League, **Hoffenheim** and **Bayer Leverkusen** were rewarded with a Europa League invitation. **Freiburg** will take part in the Conference League play-off round.

RELEGATED AND PROMOTED TEAMS
St Pauli and **Heidenheim** were accompanied in the demotion wagon by **Wolfsburg**, unseated by **Paderborn** in the promotion-relegation play-offs. **Schalke** sealed the second-division crown and will go up with top-flight new boys **Elversberg** (more on page 45).

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
This was a campaign of all the superlatives for Bayern winger **Michael Olise**. The France winger, who is now definitively ensconced in the world-class bracket, is a goalscorer and assist king from another planet.

COACH OF THE SEASON
Christian Ilzer earned plaudits a plenty for winning the Austrian Bundesliga with Sturm Graz in 2023-24, and has now transformed Hoffenheim from relegation candidates into a competitive, stable top-five outfit.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
In his first season at the BayArena following a summer switch from Hertha Berlin, Leverkusen's silky Algeria playmaker **Ibrahim Maza** has swiftly established himself as one of the most gifted attacking midfielders around.

Porto bounce back

Northern giants return to the summit for the first time in four years, while Jose Mourinho's Benfica comeback ends in disappointment

Andre Villas-Boas' first full season as Porto president, in 2024-25, was an unmitigated disaster, his two managerial appointments proving painfully out of their depth. It was third time lucky, though, with last summer's arrival of Italian head coach Francesco Farioli completely turning around the club's fortunes.

Unlike his predecessors, Farioli immediately grasped the ethos of the northern club, building a formidable team with boundless energy and a fierce "us against the world" mentality, establishing an instant bond with the supporters.

It was not always free-flowing football, but it was exceptionally effective. Porto clinched the title with three matches to spare and, in truth, the Dragons looked a sure bet to win the championship months before the season reached its conclusion.

A record-breaking start saw Porto win 18 of their first 19 Primeira Liga matches. Naturally, the team could not sustain that pace for the entire campaign, but the points buffer it gave them at the top of the table piled pressure on their rivals ahead of every match from early on in the season.

As the finishing tape came into sight, Farioli was constantly reminded of how his Ajax team had spectacularly collapsed when the Dutch championship was within their grasp the previous year, but this time it was his rivals who faltered along the home run.

While Farioli deserves immense credit for understanding the culture of a club that feeds off a perceived football landscape tilted in favour of the country's powerhouses from the capital, the work done by the Porto board in the transfer market cannot be underestimated.

Big changes were inevitable after last season's debacle. When a high player turnover takes place, a significant element of risk is always involved. Will the team gel? Will the new recruits settle quickly? Will promising youngsters fulfil their potential? In Porto's case, the answer to all three questions was a resounding yes.

The effervescent Victor Froholdt, signed from FC Copenhagen and still a teenager when the campaign kicked off, took a leading role, while Alberto Costa (Juventus), Gabri Veiga (Al Ahli), Jan Bednarek (Southampton) and Jakub Kiwior (Arsenal) also all hit the ground running, helping explain Porto's brilliant start. Come the winter window and Oskar Pietuszewski (Jagiellonia Bialystok) and Seko Fofana (Rennes) were two more precious additions who played key roles at different stages.

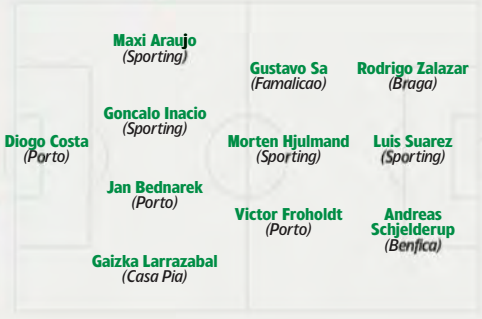
Disappointment ...Jose Mourinho's Benfica finished third, outside the Champions League places

Porto broke their record for transfer spend in a window last summer, but it has been money well invested that will be more than recuperated in the future. The valuations of Froholdt, Alberto Costa, Veiga and Pietuszewski are sure to sky-rocket. In short, Porto's transfer business last summer was an authentic object lesson in how to work the transfer market for Portugal's biggest clubs.

Yet there was another factor, one impossible to quantify in numerical terms, that cannot be ignored in the story of Porto's 2025-26 season. The sudden and untimely death of former captain Jorge Costa sparked a flood of tributes, not only from football personalities associated with the Blue and Whites but from the Portuguese football community as a whole. Back working, as director of football, at

THE BREAKDOWN

TEAM OF THE SEASON



CUP FINALS
The Portuguese Cup was won by a team outside the top flight for the first time as second-division **Torreense** stunned giants Sporting. Captain Stopira, who represented Cape Verde in the World Cup, scored the winning penalty in extra-time for a 2-1 win. In the Portuguese League Cup, **Vitoria Guimaraes** beat Braga by the same scoreline.

EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS
Porto and **Sporting** are Portugal's representatives in the Champions League. Second-tier **Torreense** will play in the Europa League, joined by **Benfica** – provided the Eagles navigate qualifying. Europa League semi-finalists **Braga** drop to the Conference League.

RELEGATED AND PROMOTED TEAMS
AVS and **Tondela** went down, replaced by Madeiran side **Maritimo** and **Academico de Viseu**, the latter returning to the big time after a 37-year absence from Portugal's top division. Casa Pia avoided relegation by beating Torreense 2-0 on aggregate in the play-off.

Portuguese champions... Porto's president and coach hold the trophy flanked by the players

the club to whom he gave such extraordinary service, Costa was hugely respected and revered by all the staff, even those who had a relatively short acquaintance with him.

Farioli frequently alluded to the need to bring the Portuguese title back to Porto as the only fitting tribute to him. Costa's passing undoubtedly helped forge an emotional bond among the entire group.

The legendary figure was captain when Porto won the Champions League in 2004, but the manager of that iconic side proved unable to rediscover his old magic on his return to Portugal.

When Jose Mourinho was re-hired as Benfica's coach in September, 25 years after leaving, his return was greeted with a sense of euphoria. Back at the club that gave him his first managerial role, whose Seixal training complex is just 35km north of his home city of Setubal where he has a street named after him, it seemed the perfect opportunity for both club and coach to revisit former glories.

Things never quite clicked, though. The campaign was not completely without its high points – there was the sensational last-gasp win against Real Madrid in the Champions League that took Benfica through to the knockout stages, and the team went the entire season unbeaten in the league – but the negatives far outweighed the positives. Costly slip-ups late on meant they missed out on Champions League football for the first time since 2010.

It is somewhat ironic that the greatest Portuguese manager in history left Portugal's biggest club in messy fashion, without completing a full season, and without silverware – just like the first time. His next job will see him reprise another former role, taking charge of Real Madrid, while the Eagles have named ex-Fulham boss Marco Silva as his replacement.

Across the capital at Silva's former club Sporting, their season also ended in a damp squib. The Lisbon giants were stunned by Torreense in the Portuguese Cup final (more on page 44), suffering the humiliation of becoming the first top-flight team to be beaten in the final by a lower-league club in the competition's 90-year history. It was a sad end to what had been an up-and-down season for the Lions. Despite overseeing the club's deepest-ever Champions League run, reaching the quarter-finals before defeat to Arsenal, coach Rui Borges starts next season under intense pressure to ally trophies to some fabulous attacking football that his team played.

> The Dragons looked a sure bet to win the championship months before the season reached its conclusion

Cup shock...Sporting players react to their cup final defeat to second-division Torreense

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
He came, he saw, he conquered. Displaying boundless energy, **Victor Froholdt** showed aggression and intelligence, and he was an increasingly potent goal threat and assist provider as the season wore on. The young Dane is already a Porto folk hero.

COACH OF THE SEASON
Porto club president Andre Villas-Boas hit the jackpot with the appointment of **Francesco Farioli**. The Italian masterfully steered the Dragons back to the top, establishing a strong bond with the city, the region and the club's supporters.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Polish teenager **Oskar Pietuszewski** gave Porto a level of unpredictability that had been missing when he was snapped up in the January transfer window. His fearlessness and creativity saw him quickly go from impact sub to first-team regular.

Star signing... Victor Froholdt

PSV continue to set the pace

With three titles in a row, Peter Bosz's side are a long way ahead of their rivals as the best team in the Netherlands

Never in the history of the Eredivisie was the championship decided as early as this season. PSV's 27th title triumph was sealed on April 5, three days earlier than their own record set in 1978 – and it would have been even earlier if they hadn't suffered two shock defeats to relegation candidates Telstar and Volendam.

PSV were the pre-season title favourites, but Feyenoord got off to the better start. The teams met for the first time in late October in Rotterdam, and the visitors claimed the three points thanks to a hat-trick from star man Ismael Saibari. The Morocco attacker's partnership with midfielder-turned-striker Guus Til proved particularly fruitful, with the latter contributing ten goals in 12 games when filling in for first-choice No.9 Ricardo Pepi.

PSV moved into top spot a few days after their trip to De Kuip by beating Fortuna Sittard. From that point onwards, the Eindhoven club hardly put a foot wrong, while Feyenoord and Ajax derailed time and again.

Sacked...former Feyenoord boss Robin van Persie

The fact that there are champions at all this season was a relief to the Dutch FA (KNVB), after relegated NAC Breda almost jeopardised the outcome of the whole campaign.

After a 6-0 defeat to Go Ahead Eagles, NAC took the KNVB to court claiming that their opponents' left-back Dean James wasn't eligible to play. Dual citizenship is restricted in the Netherlands, and since James had switched nationality in order to play for Indonesia, NAC argued that Go Ahead should have applied for a work permit for him.

The problem, though, was that this was not an isolated case. Over the course of the season, no fewer than 25 players had switched from the Netherlands to non-EU countries. This meant that if NAC's appeal had been upheld, as many as 133 matches would have to be replayed. The court, aware of the impossibility of that, rejected the claim and so the KNVB were let off the hook.

The same couldn't be said about Feyenoord and Ajax. At the start of the season there was already a lot of scepticism about whether the 2010 World Cup finalists Robin van Persie and John Heitinga were capable of challenging Peter Bosz's PSV. In the end, both clubs had too much internal trouble to be serious contenders.

Heitinga was the first victim. His reign at Ajax only lasted three months when he was sacked due to poor results. But that did little to turn the situation around and interim coach Fred Grim departed a few months later.

Too good...PSV cruised to the Eredivisie title

That was after the appointment of Jordi Cruyff as the club's new technical director. With the arrival of the son of the former Ajax legend, suddenly a Spanish armada arrived. Cruyff hired his friend and former Barcelona team-mate Oscar Garcia as coach but, again, things didn't improve.

Ending the season in fifth for the second time in three years was seen as a humiliation. They managed to

THE BREAKDOWN

TEAM OF THE SEASON

Souffian El Karouani (Utrecht)
Mika Godts (Ajax)
Matej Kovar (PSV)
Tsuyoshi Watanabe (Feyenoord)
Ismael Saibari (PSV)
Ayase Ueda (Feyenoord)
Jerdy Schouten (PSV)
Joey Veerman (PSV)
Guus Til (PSV)
Bart van Rooij (Twente)
Darko Nejasmic (NEC)

CUP FINAL

A year after losing the 2025 KNVB Cup final by conceding a clumsy late penalty against Go Ahead Eagles, **AZ** got their revenge. They beat team of the season NEC in a clear 5-1 win. Mees de Wit, Sven Mijnans, Peer Koopmeiners, Kees Smit and Troy Parrott were all on the scoresheet.

EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS

PSV and **Feyenoord** took the automatic Champions League spots, with third-placed **NEC** entering the qualifiers. Cup winners **AZ** head into the Europa League and could be joined by **Twente** who play qualifiers. **Ajax** must console themselves with the Conference League preliminaries after a miserable season.

RELEGATED AND PROMOTED TEAMS

Heracles and **NAC Breda** swapped places with Eerste Divisie champions **ADO Den Haag** and runners-up **Cambuur Leeuwarden. Volendam**'s record as the Eredivisie's most relegated team extended to 11 after losing in the play-offs to **Willem II** who return after a year's absence.

Saving the season...Ajax goalkeeper Maarten Paes during the European play-off shootout

salvage something from the wreckage of their season by beating Utrecht in the play-offs for the Conference League preliminaries, albeit they needed a penalty shootout to do so.

Criticism is unlikely to fade away any time soon. For next season, Spanish will again be the most spoken language after Cruyff installed Michel as coach. The fact that he arrives fresh from relegation from La Liga with Girona means he will need to make a quick impression to convince his doubters.

Over at Feyenoord, qualifying for the Champions League after struggling to keep NEC and FC Twente at bay was a huge relief – but that is about the only good news. Too much went wrong under Van Persie, who the previous season also suffered an up-and-down campaign as coach of Heerenveen, including suffering a 9-1 defeat to AZ. This season saw a reported clash with Quinten Timber, which ended with the Netherlands midfielder stripped of the captaincy and sold to Marseille in January.

> PSV hardly put a foot wrong, while Feyenoord and Ajax derailed time and again

Van Persie's incoming transfers were also questionable, most notably the arrival of Raheem Sterling. The former England and Manchester City forward was hailed with much fanfare, but his contribution was limited to just seven games, mostly as a substitute, and he has been regarded as a waste of money.

Former player and current pundit Willem van Hanegem said that any other Feyenoord coach would have been sacked – and that fate eventually befell Van Persie. After conducting a "thorough internal analysis," new general manager Robert Eenhoorn and technical director Devy Rigaux decided to end his 16-month stint.

"We took into account, among other things, the development of the style of play and the declining trend in terms of points total, both in Europe and in the Eredivisie," said Rigaux. "The conclusion was that it is better to start next season with a new head coach." That coach will be Giovanni van Bronckhorst, who won the title with the club back in 2016-17.

Only time will tell whether Michel and Van Bronckhorst can lead Ajax and Feyenoord back to challenging PSV in 2026-27. But for now, Bosz shouldn't worry too much – currently, he is miles ahead of his rivals from Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Spanish-born Morocco international **Ismael Saibari** was crucial in PSV's success. The 25-year-old attacking midfielder combines power with finesse, while his fitness has also improved. This season was his best with 15 goals and eight assists.

COACH OF THE SEASON
For years **Peter Bosz** was praised for the way his teams played but criticised for not winning any silverware. Those critics have been silenced by his third consecutive Eredivisie title with PSV. The 62-year-old's experience won out over the rookies at Feyenoord and Ajax.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Telstar were expected to go straight back down to the second tier, but coach Anthony Correia proved that smaller clubs can stay up while playing good football. Safety was secured with a 2-1 win over Volendam on the final day thanks to a late penalty by goalkeeper Ronald Koeman Jr.

Player of the Year... prolific PSV attacker Ismael Saibari

Celtic break Hearts

Edinburgh club's brave bid for the title is brought to a cruel end by Martin O'Neill's side on the final day of the season

The most exciting Scottish Premiership title race of recent memory required two key ingredients: the dysfunction of Celtic and Rangers, and the transformation of Hearts.

It was back in October that the first signs of a potential power shift emerged. Hearts' 3-1 win over Celtic took them eight points clear at the top of the table, and prompted the departure of Bhoys head coach Brendan Rodgers. That same month, Rangers manager Russell Martin had to be smuggled out of Falkirk Stadium after a 1-1 draw, with a large police presence protecting the players. His time was up.

Meanwhile, under club president Ann Budge, Hearts had developed into one of the best-run clubs in Scotland. A decisive shift came with Tony Bloom's investment and data. Hearts were no longer a typical Scottish challenger. In his first full season, manager Derek McInnes immediately reshaped the team to deliver compact and solid performances that the opposition couldn't break down.

Broken Hearts...midfielder Cammy Devlin reacts to Hearts' final-day defeat to Celtic

Captain and talismanic striker Lawrence Shankland produced the season of his career, as his leadership and goalscoring kept Hearts at the top from October until the final minutes of the season. Alongside him, Claudio Braga provided a crucial secondary scoring threat, often arriving late into the box with timing and composure. Out of possession, the side's aggression was set by Cammy Devlin, who brought intensity and work rate. From wide areas, Alexandros Kyziridis was the creative spark, providing consistent service and opportunities. His delivery and final ball made him one of the most important attacking outlets in the side.

The gauntlet was well and truly laid down for Celtic, champions in 13 of the previous 14 years. Having parted way with Rodgers, they turned to club legend Martin O'Neill, the man who had led them to the three titles back at the start of the century. Rodgers had compared his Celtic side to a Honda Civic, and supporters quickly adapted the image, imagining O'Neill battering up the motorway in that same Civic, heading back to Celtic Park.

O'Neill had as much to prove to himself as anyone. He spoke openly about how his managerial career had not ended as he would have wished, sacked by then-Championship side Nottingham Forest back in 2019, and his return carried a sense of unfinished business. Celtic's players responded to him immediately, beating Rangers in a League Cup semi-final.

Yet despite O'Neill signalling his intention to continue, Celtic moved for former Columbus Crew manager Wilfried Nancy. Questions surrounded the appointment. Nancy's coaching record suggested a manager more comfortable developing long-term projects than navigating the immediate pressures and expectations of Celtic. The transition unsettled the players, and the side imploded. Domestic form plummeted while that League Cup final was lost to St Mirren.

By the time O'Neill returned in early January, Hearts were in control, Rangers had recovered under German coach Danny Rohl and Motherwell had also

Stunning comeback... Martin O'Neill won his fourth league title with Celtic

THE BREAKDOWN

TEAM OF THE SEASON

CUP FINAL

The nadir of **Celtic's** season came in the form of December's League Cup final when they were beaten 3-1 by **St Mirren**. Five months later, though, the Bhoys won the Scottish Cup with a win over Dunfermline Athletic to complete their 13th league-cup double.

EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS

Hearts could console themselves for missing out on the league title by qualifying for the Champions League. They will enter the second qualifying round, with **Celtic** to come in two rounds later. **Rangers** head into Europa League qualifying, with **Motherwell** and **Hibernian** in Conference League qualifying.

RELEGATED AND PROMOTED TEAMS

Having endured a 33-game winless run, **Livingston** were relegated as the league's bottom side. St Mirren almost joined them, but held off Partick Thistle in the play-off final with a 2-1 aggregate win. **St Johnstone** came straight back up as Championship winners after a one-year absence.

Switching sides...Shankland and McInnes

entered the conversation. The Steelmen eventually finished fourth, thanks to the goals of Tawanda Maswanhise and an outstanding defence marshalled by goalkeeper Calum Ward.

Yet, even in the face of three rivals, O'Neill was able to quell the chaos inside Celtic, calm fans, and resuscitate the side for a second time. The "last-minute Celtic" mentality returned, as crucial late goals were scored time and again to secure vital points. With three games to go, a 3-1 win against Rangers, courtesy of a Daizen Maeda brace, knocked their Old Firm rivals out of the race.

> Martin O'Neill was able to quell the chaos inside Celtic, calm fans, and resuscitate the side for a second time

Three days later, Celtic travelled to Motherwell needing a win to stay in control of the title race. And they got it – but in hugely controversial circumstances, thanks to a late, late penalty, awarded by VAR for a contentious handball by Sam Nicholson.

That result meant that when Celtic hosted Hearts on the final day, instead of needing to win by three clear goals, any three points would do, while the visitors would lift their first title in 66 years with a draw.

Shankland's first-half header kept the Tynecastle club in the driving seat, but Celtic responded after the break and secured a 3-1 win. For O'Neill, it was the hardest-fought title of his career, and he will stick around for another season to try to defend it after agreeing a new contract at Parkhead.

Devastated, Hearts' players and fans took little consolation from splitting the Old Firm, nor from the many plaudits that have come their way – especially when, ten days after the loss, Rangers announced they had signed Shankland. Compounding the misery was the swift announcement that McInnes will follow him to Ibrox as manager, replacing Rohl who has moved on to take the hot-seat at Red Bull Salzburg in Austria. Still, with further recruitment guided by Bloom, and a new manager in place in the form of Belgian Wouter Vrancken, Hearts will hope to rebuild for next season.

As for Rangers, although the title eluded them, Rohl restored a clear footballing identity, implementing a recognisable style and a commitment to attacking football. How that now shapes up under McInnes will be fascinating to watch. The shifting in dynamics all bodes well for another intriguing renewal at the top of the table next season.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Motherwell's **Tawanda Maswanhise** emerged as a standout talent in one of Scotland's most intriguing teams of recent years. The Zimbabwe international was the Premiership's top scorer with 17 goals, equally effective out wide or as a striker. Holding onto him will be a major challenge for the Steelmen.

COACH OF THE SEASON
If **Martin O'Neill** had led Celtic all season, the title race may not have been quite so exciting. Under his management, in two separate spells, Celtic only lost four games in all competitions, having lost six out of eight under Wilfried Nancy. He will be back again next season, eyeing a fifth Premiership crown.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Falkirk boss John McGlynn described **Barney Stewart** as "a revelation", and few players embodied the club's rise more completely than the young forward. Just 18 months ago he was at uni; now Stewart is established as one of Scotland's most exciting young talents with his form earning a move to EFL Championship side West Bromwich Albion.

Top scorer ...Tawanda Maswanhise

SPECIAL REPORT

WHAT NOW?

Forgotten by UEFA, ignored by CONCACAF and targeted by Trump, Greenland and its football team are trying to forge their own path

Words: Steve Menary

If Donald Trump had had his way, Greenland might have started this summer as part of a country co-hosting the 2026 World Cup. Instead, and while the rest of the footballing world was turning their attention to the finals in the United States, Canada and Mexico, Greenland's embattled footballers set off for Italy.

Lacking affiliation and support from the rest of the world game, and forced to find matches wherever they could, Greenland's FA (KAK) had turned to the Confederation of Independent Football Associations (ConIFA).

Representing teams that are unaffiliated with FIFA, ConIFA organised the sixth edition of their European championship in June.

Greenland's first match pitted them against hosts and two-time winners Padania, a team representing the eight regions of Northern Italy, with a track record of fielding experienced players in this competition.

Played underneath the baking afternoon sun, the conditions could not have been more alien for the Greenland players. "I was in Nuuk [Greenland's capital] a fortnight ago and it was -2°C and there was still snow on the ground," said Morten Rutkjaer, Greenland's Danish coach.

Striker Riccardo Ravasi, who plays in Serie D for Cantu Sanpaolo, put Padania ahead after half an hour. They doubled their lead ten minutes into the second half through Nicolo Colombo, before Adam Ejler Hansen immediately pulled one back following the restart.

Greenland's rusty start was understandable. The team hadn't played together in an 11-a-side game for nearly ten months. With Greenland's outdoor season lasting a mere three months, many play futsal instead.

Niklas Thustrup Johansen from Ilulissat, a coastal town in Western Greenland, had not played an 11-a-side game since a training camp in Turkey in 2024. Introduced as a substitute, he had the pace and close control that futsal encourages and helped keep Greenland in the game until the 86th minute when Federico Rossetti sealed a 3-1 win for Padania.

With this defeat, Greenland's

trophy hopes were effectively ended after one game – Padania had already won their first game 4-1 against Raetia, a team representing the Italian-speaking Grisons of Switzerland, and so advanced as winners of the three-team group – but most of their travelling party took a wider view. "I missed this," says Thustrup Johansen, who works as a tour guide shuttling tourists from cruise ships in his boat and shuttle bus.

Patrick Frederiksen, Greenland's captain, made his debut back in 2017, but games proved sporadic until the charismatic Rutkjaer took over as head coach in 2020 and helped overcome the inertia that has sometimes gripped Greenland football.

After the Padania loss, Greenland took on Raetia with Rene Eriksen Petersen scoring the fastest goal in ConIFA history in a well-worked move straight from the kick-off. Thustrup Johansen added a second on 33 minutes and second-half goals from Angutivik Gundel-Collin and Bastian Rosing secured an easy 4-1 victory.

If Greenland had been at full strength, they might have done better. Nemo Thomsen, a 22-year-old striker from Ilulissat, moved to Denmark as a teenager with his parents to pursue a career in football. After flitting between a number of Danish clubs, he eventually settled at third-tier side Brabrand IF and scored regularly as they won promotion last season. Brabrand have been struggling this season and were, unsurprisingly, not keen on releasing their star striker with the season still alive.

Thomsen did feature when Greenland played in a 2025 European amateur championship last year organised by the Austrian-based Amateur National Teams Football Association and featuring the hosts, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Slovenia. In their two games, Greenland lost 5-1 to Austria, but ran Slovenia close, losing 5-4.

Thomsen and 24-year-old Mathias Christensen, who plays in Norway's top flight for Aalesunds FK, were among eight players absent in Italy that would have made the Greenland squad. Out of 22 players that travelled to Italy, only 14 were based in Greenland.

What now for Greenland's football team?...a pitch on the Arctic island
Photo credit: Aningaaq R. Carlsen, Visit Greenland

Traditionally, Greenland only called up a handful of players based overseas, mostly from Denmark, but under Rutkjaer the nature of the island's football is changing. He shrugged off Greenland's early elimination, saying: "This tournament is great because we can bring other players through and give them experience. We cannot say to Nemo and Mathias to come because we are not a member of anything."

Thomsen and Christensen are the sort of players Rutkjaer and KAK can build a team around. The question is, what for?

Historically, the focus has been on the football tournament at the biennial Island Games, a sort of mini-Olympics for islands. Greenland have been regular entrants since 1989 and were runners-up in 2013 and 2017. But a condensed week's worth of matches once every two years does not help develop football – particularly in a place that faces a swathe of challenges few other teams could imagine.

Greenland has full artificial pitches, but bad weather is a constant problem. This drives players indoors to play futsal year-round, which consequently attracts more government funding than football. With no roads, the island's 70-plus clubs are restricted to local 11-a-side games that are not even weekly.

This disorderly season culminates in a week-long, 11-a-side championship, but getting there by boat and air travel often disrupted by weather can turn a week-long championship into three weeks away from home for some players.

Despite all these challenges, and though Greenland has qualified for the handball World Cup previously, football remains the island's main sport and one that is not an over-commercialised product but rooted in the community. When Greenland play abroad, there are cultural exchanges that were once common when football was first being codified and exported from Britain more than a century ago.

In Italy, the Greenlanders visited Udinese for a game with a local XI that included a reception and a visit from the city's mayor. In Carate Brianza, the squad took in the Basilica of Saint Peter and Paul and visited Como on a non-matchday.

For all the cultural importance of football, Rutkjaer and the players know that their game is at a crossroads. "Right now, we cannot build anything up," sighs Rutkjaer, who played professionally in Denmark for Boldklub and B93, where he was assistant manager prior to joining Greenland. "We should build a new national stadium, but for what?"

The island has had many head coaches but often their terms prove brief. Rutkjaer has sought to create a team ethos despite the lack of matches and brought impetus to the KAK, which wants wider affiliation.

Greenland's main cultural links are with Europe, but UEFA changed its rules for new members after the contentious admission of Gibraltar and Kosovo in 2013 and 2016 respectively, which had been opposed by Spain and Serbia. Only places recognised as countries by the United Nations could join, leaving Greenland – an autonomous country within the Kingdom of Denmark – out in the cold.

KAK abandoned attempts to foster links with UEFA in favour of trying to join CONCACAF, the federation for North and Central America and the Caribbean, which has members in a similar position such as the Dutch territories of Bonaire and Sint Maarten and four French islands. All are full CONCACAF members but not in FIFA. The Greenlanders aspired to similar status.

FIFA quietly changed its constitution in line with UEFA's in 2024 and, worried that this may be adopted by other regional confederations, KAK hand-delivered an application to CONCACAF's HQ in Miami last May, but the bid went ignored for months, leaving the Greenland national team in limbo.

> "Right now, we cannot build anything up. We should build a new national stadium, but for what?"
>
> **Greenland coach Morten Rutkjaer**

Skipper...captain Patrick Frederiksen during the clash with Padania *Credit: Alessio Beri*

CONCACAF general secretary Philippe Moggio eventually agreed to meet KAK in Miami in February 2025, but then US President Donald Trump suggested that Greenland could be annexed. The meeting with CONCACAF was subsequently cancelled and then moved to London in April, before being abandoned again at the last minute.

The 2025 Island Games were staged in Orkney but, due to a shortage of accommodation, a draw was carried out last year and Greenland missed out. Withdrawals saw Greenland receive a belated invite, but KAK turned this down to try to focus on arranging games in Europe last summer with CONCACAF members who used a large number of players from their European diaspora.

On the eve of the 2025 Gold Cup, CONCACAF held an extraordinary congress and Greenland's bid was unanimously rejected by all 41 member associations. Delegates at the congress were told the application did not comply with the norms set by CONCACAF. "I think it has to do with statutes and other requirements," one national association president who was present at the meeting told *World Soccer*.

Charismatic coach ...Morten Rutkjaer

After the vote, KAK president Kenneth Kleist said: "This is not a victory for football democracy, it does not make football accessible to everyone globally."

Sources close to KAK say CONCACAF declined a meeting to explain the "decision and process."

The subject is a sensitive one as Trump's spectre lingers over the island, while the footballers' attempts to play more regularly have wider ramifications. Greenland's handballers already play in the North and Central American region. The island's most popular sport moving away from Europe and closer to North America is unlikely to be appreciated by its ultimate rulers, Denmark, and even the European Union.

All this seemed like a world away from northern Italy, where Greenland faced Canton Ticino, a side from Switzerland's southernmost Italian-speaking region and drawn largely from the reserves at Swiss third-tier side FC Paradiso, in a bronze medal play-off. Gundel-Collin put Greenland ahead with a near-post header and goals from Miilu Jensen and a winner ten minutes from time from Ejler Hansen sealed a thrilling 3-2 win.

A training camp will now follow in October, but there are no more competitive games lined up. KAK is seeking legal redress to get an explanation for CONCACAF's rejection, with football in Greenland now finding itself at a crossroads.

ConIFA Euros... Greenland's players ahead of their game with Padania

Glenn Moore

2027 World Cup qualifying latest

Several teams have already booked their places for next summer's finals in Brazil

While most of the global game's focus was firmly on the men's World Cup in North America, other eyes were fixed on the Women's World Cup in South America a year's hence.

Appetites were whetted by a feisty two-match series between hosts Brazil and four-time winners the United States, re-matches of the 2024 Olympic and Gold Cup finals, both won 1-0 by the US.

The pair subsequently traded wins in California last year but the rivalry went up a notch in June. After Brazil beat the visitors 2-1 in Sao Paulo, USA responded with a 1-0 win in Fortaleza in front of 55,000 very passionate home fans.

During a game marked by physicality and confrontations, Brazil head coach Arthur Elias and three of his staff were dismissed, then players Bia Zaneratto and Tarciane were sent off. At the final whistle, Kerolin and Ludmila were also red-carded for dissent, bringing the total to an astonishing eight.

After the first match, US coach Emma Hayes had spoken to her team about the value of going outside their comfort zone – most USA fixtures are home games against modest opposition. This was certainly a learning experience.

However, it is likely to mean the USA will have the crowds against them when they return next year, with women's game legend Marta leading a chorus of post-match jibes on social media by players and supporters. Referring to the way NWSL rival Emily Sonnett fell to the ground in apparent agony after a mild push by Bia Zaneratto, prompting her second yellow card dismissal, Marta posted suggesting Hollywood studios may want to "check out this amazing actress," and tagging Sonnett.

Elsewhere the attention is on the qualifying campaign. There are 31 places available alongside the World Cup hosts, 13 of which have already been claimed. Three will be decided via a ten-team inter-confederation play-off series in November-December and early 2027. Some big names are facing unwanted complications, including the runners-up last time out.

EUROPE

UEFA's decision to use the Nations League format for 2027 World Cup qualifying has been generally welcomed, not least by teams like England who saw no point in the previous system in which they scored 80 goals, conceded zero, and eviscerated Latvia 20-0.

Nevertheless, it left the Lionesses feeling bruised after a 4-0 drubbing in Mallorca by Spain, a scoreline that was not only their worst defeat in 16 years but also flattered them such was *La Roja's* superiority.

It also meant a layer of jeopardy the 2023 finalists and reigning European champions could really have done without as it sent them into a second qualifying stage comprising play-offs.

There are 31 places available alongside World Cup hosts Brazil, 13 of which have already been claimed

England should cruise past Greece, then either Slovakia or (more likely) Ukraine, who they have already beaten 6-1 and 3-0 in qualifying, but using the autumn windows for the fixtures will hamper their preparation for Brazil.

Sweden and the Netherlands, semi-finalists and quarter-finalists in 2023 respectively, and Euro 2025 semi-finalists Italy will also have to go through the play-offs to reach Brazil, and while they too should do so there are no guarantees, even with two-legged matches – as Italy's men's team knows all too well.

World Cup ever-presents...Germany cruised through the WC qualifiers undefeated

Having won the home tie against Spain 1-0 at Wembley, a point would have put England through on head-to-head; even a 1-0 loss would, due to goal difference, have probably been enough. But Spain gained a measure of revenge for their Euros final defeat and made a significant statement ahead of next year: dethroning them in South America will not be easy.

In a tough group, Italy and Sweden were squeezed out by Denmark, who twice held the Italians, beat the Swedes home and away, and benefited from Sweden taking four points off Italy.

The Dutch took four points off France, but were undone by a 3-2 defeat away to Republic of Ireland, who also go into the play-offs.

Maintaining their record of attending every World Cup finals, Germany were the first European team to qualify, doing so with a match to spare ahead of Norway and with the highest points tally.

While there was an argument that the top two teams should qualify automatically (which would have secured places for the Netherlands, England, Italy and Norway) the fact 34 of the 48 group matches were settled by two goals or less, and only one by more than five, underlined the value of the new system.

The play-offs will take place from October to December with 32 teams

Feisty clash...World Cup hosts Brazil took on record winners USA

whittled down to eight in two rounds.

The most intriguing match-up is Belgium or Poland against Republic of Ireland or Kazakhstan, with any of the first three capable of qualifying. Switzerland-Austria is also a competitive likely second-round fixture should they see off Israel and Kosovo respectively.

Of the bigger names, Italy should dispense of Belarus easily enough but could face a tricky second tie against Finland (barring a shock v Serbia) with the Finns showing real promise at Euro 2025. Sweden (who first face Lithuania) will need to be on their guard against likely second-round opponents Scotland (who play Czech Republic), but Norway (who've drawn Romania and then Wales or Albania) and Netherlands (who take on Hungary and then Turkey or Slovenia) are strong favourites to advance. Croatia or Iceland v Portugal or Northern Ireland makes up the draw.

ASIA

The Asian Cup in March doubled up as qualification with winners Japan, finalists Australia, and semi-finalists South Korea and China all booking their places. The losing quarter-finalists contested play-in matches for the right to join them.

The Philippines and North Korea won, leaving Uzbekistan, who hope to emulate their men's team and reach a first finals, and Chinese Taipei to take their chances in the inter-confederation play-offs.

Payback...Spain thumped England 4-0 in World Cup qualifying to avenge their Euro 2025 final defeat

OCEANIA

New Zealand, as might be expected, took the sole automatic qualifying place, but despite home advantage did so narrowly against Papua New Guinea. Sunderland's Katie Kitching scored the only goal of the qualifying process decider in Auckland after they'd thrashed Fiji 5-0 in Hamilton.

PNG, seeking a World Cup finals debut, go into the inter-confederation play-offs.

AFRICA

World Cup qualifying is via the Africa Cup of Nations, which belatedly gets underway on July 26, four months after it was originally scheduled to take place.

The semi-finalists will qualify directly for the World Cup finals with the beaten quarter-finalists all contesting for the two inter-confederation play-offs spots.

Hosts Morocco, perennial qualifiers Nigeria and South Africa are favourites to lift the title and, together with free-scoring Zambia, are most likely to claim the automatic spots.

But Algeria, who didn't concede a goal in four matches at WAFCON 2024, and semi-finalists Ghana are outside bets. So too, on reputation at least, should be Cameroon. Three-time WAFCON finalists, they were one of the four teams given a second chance when the finals were expanded from 12 to 16 teams in late 2025, after qualifying had finished.

There are two debutants: Cape Verde, many of whose players are based in Portugal, and Malawi who, while the lowest-ranked team at the time of the draw, might surprise with the Chawinga sisters Tabitha (OL Lyonnes) and Temwa (Kansas City Current) leading the attack.

- **Group A**
Morocco, Algeria, Senegal, Kenya
- **Group B** South Africa, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Tanzania
- **Group C**
Nigeria, Zambia, Egypt, Malawi
- **Group D**
Ghana, Cameroon, Mali, Cape Verde

SOUTH AMERICA

With Brazil qualified as hosts, only two automatic places were available with a round-robin tournament to determine them. Favourites Colombia and Argentina went unbeaten to secure them, well clear of the field. Third-placed Venezuela, who are yet to appear in the finals, and fourth-placed Ecuador, who pipped Peru, will enter the inter-confederation play-offs.

CONCACAF

The W Championship doubles up as qualifying and has reached the last-eight stage, at which point USA and Canada enter. As in Africa, the quarter-final winners book a place in Brazil with the losing quartet meeting to decide the two inter-confederation play-off spots. Of the octet, only El Salvador have never appeared at a Women's World Cup.

- **Quarter-Finals**
USA v El Salvador, Jamaica v Costa Rica, Canada v Panama, Mexico v Haiti

2027 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

In addition to the hosts, 13 teams have qualified for next year's World Cup

- **Brazil *(hosts)***
- **Germany**
- **Spain**
- **Denmark**
- **France**
- **Argentina**
- **Colombia**
- **Japan**
- **Australia**
- **South Korea**
- **China**
- **Philippines**
- **North Korea**
- **New Zealand**

WANT IT TODAY? GO DIGITAL

WorldSoccer issues you may have missed...

April 2026

May 2026

World Cup Special 2026

June 2026

Also from the publishers of WorldSoccer

World Soccer Presents

As Messi mania swept football, we were there every step of the way to track Leo's epic journey.

A collection of interviews including Kaka, Ronaldo, Cruyff, Sacchi, Xavi, Pele, Klinsmann and Wenger.

The greatest coach of all time or a flawed genius? You decide after reading this dedication to Pep.

Celebrating the history of our award winners, such as Platini, Maradona, Zidane, Ronaldo and Ronaldinho.

An anthology of the latter era of the Prem, including Manchester City's rise and Leicester's shock title win.

Annuals, Bookazines & Merchandise

Our ranked countdown of football's greatest-ever club, international, player and managerial rivalries.

A look back at 30 years of MLS: the stories, fans, rivalries and players that made it what it is today.

The ultimate club and international soccer year book, packed with reviews, stats, tables and scorers.

£15

Spain '82 T-Shirt

£15

Mexico '86 T-Shirt

£15

Italia '90 T-Shirt

SAVE 10% when you spend £25 or more **VOUCHERCODE: WSCSHOP10**

shop.kelsey.co.uk/WSCBK

+44 (0) 1959 543 747

Offers subject to availability. Prices for goods delivered to destinations outside of the UK may be higher

World Service

Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents

INCLUDING The Sweeper

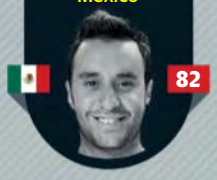
88

STEVE MENARY
Cuba

84

JOEL RICHARDS
Argentina

MARTIN DEL PALACIO LANGER
Mexico



82

MIKE PLASTOW
Japan

86

82

CONCACAF Champions Cup winners...Toluca

PLUS

NEWS

82 CONCACAF Champions Cup
84 Argentina Apertura
86 J. League
88 Cuba

THE SWEEPER

89 Tales from the 211

RESULTS, TABLES, FIXTURES

90 Club football
98 Internationals

84

Argentina Apertura review...Belgrano win shock title

Mexico

MARTIN DEL PALACIO LANGER

Toluca crowned club kings of CONCACAF

Liga MX's two-decade dominance of the Champions Cup continues with victory for *Los Diablos Rojos*

Penalty-shootout hero...Toluca goalkeeper Luis Garcia wheels off in celebration

Toluca claimed the 2026 CONCACAF Champions Cup, their first continental trophy since 2003. It was a genuine achievement for a historic side that, despite being frequently dominant domestically, had constantly missed out in the regional scene, and another demonstration of the unprecedented domination of the Mexican league in the main CONCACAF competition.

After winning back-to-back Liga MX titles, this season *Los Diablos Rojos* set their sights on ending their CONCACAF drought, even at the expense of what would have been a historic local three-peat. Coach Antonio Mohamed reserved his strongest side for the Champions Cup and played the Clausura 2026 tournament with a second-string side that crashed out in the quarter-finals.

The bet paid off, however, as they managed to beat fellow Mexican side Tigres UANL in a tense final which was decided by the slimmest of margins. The match was played at Toluca's home ground, Estadio Nemesio Diez, but the hosts never felt comfortable and their goalkeeper Luis Garcia was the key player during the regulation time, which ended goalless.

Substitute Jorge Diaz Price opened the scoring against the run of play near the end of the first half of extra-time to put the trophy within Toluca's reach, but Brazilian central defender Joaquim equalised in the 114th minute for Tigres to set up a dramatic penalty shootout. That was ultimately decided in sudden death when Garcia stopped Juan Jose Purata's effort to give the hosts the third regional crown in their history and their first in 23 years.

Los Diablos Rojos' title should be viewed on two levels. One is the club's own story, which should have included more international success given that they are the team with the second-most Liga MX titles. The other is what it says about Liga MX as a collective and the current state of football in the CONCACAF region.

With this result, Mexican clubs have now won 20 of the last 21 editions of the Champions Cup. The sole exception was the Seattle Sounders in 2022, a result that was widely presented at the time as evidence that MLS was finally closing the gap on Mexican football. Four titles for Liga MX teams later, that gap has not closed. It remains exactly where it was.

There is no comparable example in world football of a domestic league exerting such sustained dominance over its confederation's premier club competition. In Europe, the Champions League has been won by clubs from Spain, France, England and Germany in the past decade alone. In South America, Brazil has dominated the Copa Libertadores lately but still has many years to go to match Mexico's record. In Asia and Africa, the balance of power is even more dispersed. In CONCACAF, Mexico dominate with a consistency that has no real equivalent anywhere else in world football.

Moreover, Liga MX's dominance in CONCACAF is not dependent on its two or three biggest clubs operating at their peak; it is not America winning because they have more money, or Monterrey winning because they boast the country's finest infrastructure. It's a broader, structural superiority that has allowed eight different Mexican sides to win it in those 21 editions.

> Mexican clubs have now won 20 of the last 21 editions of the Champions Cup

Kings of CONCACAF ...Toluca players lift the Champions Cup

The reasons behind that dominance are the same as they have always been, though they are perhaps worth restating because familiarity can sometimes obscure perspective. Liga MX combines a vast supporter base with levels of investment that allow clubs to assemble squads considerably stronger than the MLS average. The weekly competitive demands of the league produce teams better equipped for high-intensity knockout football and, with only 18 teams, the talent pool is less dispersed than in the 30-team MLS.

It's true that the spring calendar of MLS means that its teams are unable to start the regional competition in peak form, but it's also true that they enjoy the structural advantage of having more teams in the competition – this year they had nine teams compared to six from Liga MX – and that their results in Mexico have been dismal – in the past five years they've won just two matches, drawing eight and losing 16.

Winning coach... Toluca's Antonio Mohamed

With their win Toluca also become the first team from CONCACAF to qualify for the 2028 Club World Cup, a tournament where Liga MX sides will try to improve their performance from the last edition where only Monterrey managed to get out of their group – and that starts by keeping the streak alive and winning every CONCACAF Champions Cup to get all the available slots.

Argentina

JOEL RICHARDS

Returning heroes fire Belgrano to history

El Pirata win the first top-flight league title in their 121-year history thanks to a trio of legendary figures

Review

"As a kid I didn't dream about winning the World Cup," said captain Lucas Zelarayan, still bursting with pride and emotion days after winning the first-ever championship for his club. "I wanted to win the title with Belgrano."

El Pirata, from Cordoba, won a final that was loaded with drama and history. Their opponents were River Plate, the country's most successful team with

Late equaliser... Nicolas Fernandez scores from the penalty spot

38 top-flight titles, while Belgrano were vying for their first.

Belgrano essentially held home advantage after the AFA named the fabulous Mario Kempes stadium in Cordoba as host venue. Yet more than just home advantage, Belgrano also held a psychological grip over River.

Fifteen years ago, the two clubs met in a play-off. Running out 3-1 winners on aggregate, *El Pirata* won promotion from the second division and condemned *Los Millonarios* to their first-ever relegation – a seismic event in the history of the Argentine game. The ghost of that relegation still haunts the Estadio Monumental in Buenos Aires.

Only two names are on both the 2011 and 2026 team sheets – Belgrano coach Ricardo Zielinski and attacking midfielder Franco "*El Mudo*" Vazquez. Just as it was years ago, both were instrumental in another famous victory over River Plate.

River still dispute the decision to award Belgrano a penalty in the 85th minute of this year's final. They were leading 2-1 through goals from Facundo Colidio and Tomas Galvan and were on course to win before Belgrano striker Nicolas Fernandez converted the spot-kick. Three minutes later, the substitute grabbed his second to snatch the lead and the title.

Playing a hand in the winning goal was 37-year-old Vazquez, back at the club after a long spell across a host of clubs in Italy and Spain. "I was part of it in 2011," he said, recalling the play-off. "I always dreamed of coming back and winning a title for our supporters."

For River, there were shades not only of the 2011 relegation but also the 2019 Copa Libertadores final, when they were winning 1-0 with minutes remaining before two quick-fire goals from Flamengo's Gabriel Barbosa overturned River's lead; memories of a lost Libertadores final and a relegation all in one.

> "This is what we came back for"
> Belgrano head coach Ricardo Zielinski

Zielinski rejected comparisons between 2011 and 2026. "They are totally different matches and achievements, with different people. One match was a fight to play in the top division and the other to become champions."

Nonetheless, it was a historic win for Belgrano, the club's first title triumph in 121 years and this after suffering four relegations from the top flight since the 1980s. "This is what we came back for," said Zielinski on why he returned after nine years away from the club.

First-ever title... Belgrano captain Lucas Zelarayan lifts the Apertura trophy

El Pirata...Belgrano supporters celebrate

Along with the leadership of captain Zelarayan – who himself returned to his boyhood club last year after spells in Mexico, the US and Saudi Arabia – and the returning Vazquez, plus the goal threat of Fernandez, Belgrano showed spirit and character in this Apertura campaign, navigating Argentina's latest version of an ever-changing league format that is now decided by a knockout phase. The win over city rivals Talleres in the last 16 *Clasico* is viewed as the pivotal moment.

Belgrano follow in the footsteps of Platense, who also won their first league title just last year, with *El Pirata* becoming the latest name in the sequence of seven different teams winning the last seven championships in Argentina. The extra reward is to make their debut in the Copa Libertadores next year.

For River Plate it was a lost opportunity. The Estadio Monumental is hosting Copa Sudamericana matches this season after losing out on Copa Libertadores qualification. This final was a chance to confirm the club have turned a corner under Eduardo Coudet, who took over after the legendary coach Marcelo Gallardo's troubled second spell at River ended. There will be wholesale changes in the squad in the coming weeks as the club aims to reinvent itself again.

It has not been a vintage year for any of Argentina's "Big Five". Boca Juniors crashed out of the Apertura in the last 16, and their supporters' glee at seeing River lose to Belgrano was short-lived, after Boca failed to progress from the Libertadores group stage and dropped down into the Sudamericana.

Racing Club dismissed head coach Gustavo Costas after failing to mount a challenge in either the league or the Sudamericana, which they had won in 2024. Racing's neighbours Independiente had no continental football whatsoever and lost in the round of 16 in the Apertura, so too San Lorenzo who – to add insult to injury – failed to pass the group phase in the Copa Sudamericana.

SEASON'S BEST

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Lucas Zelarayan *(Belgrano)*
The Belgrano academy graduate, now in his 30s, returned home after a decade away playing for Tigres UANL, Columbus Crew and Al Fateh. The Armenia playmaker finished as Belgrano's joint-top scorer with Nicolas Fernandez.

Title winner... Lucas Zelarayan

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Santiago Beltran *(River Plate)*
Began the season as third-choice goalkeeper at the Monumental, but an injury to club legend Franco Armani opened the door. The 21-year-old's top-class performances earned him a place in Lionel Scaloni's thinking and a national team debut in the World Cup warm-up matches.

MANAGER OF THE SEASON
Ricardo Zielinski *(Belgrano)*
Mastermind of two famous victories over River Plate, back at the club after a nine-year absence to deliver the first title in the team's 121-year history.

Japan

MIKE PLASTOW

Vissel Kobe win interim J. League trophy

Shortened campaign is won by Kobe, ahead of a new era for Japanese football

Changing the Japanese top flight from a year-round calendar to a European style August-May format presented the J. League with a question: how to fill the gap between the end of the 2025 season and the start of the 2026-27 campaign?

The answer was the One Hundred Year Vision League, named for a longstanding J. League slogan for the growth of Japanese football. The top tier was divided into East and West Divisions of ten teams each, with all teams playing each other twice.

The final standings were then decided by ten two-legged play-offs between the teams in the corresponding positions in each division: first against first, second against second, and so on down the table. There were also penalty shootouts instead of draws, but no promotion or relegation. The J. League reverts to the normal league format when the 2026-27 season kicks off in the second week of August.

Vissel Kobe, J. League champions in 2023 and 2024, roared back to lift the title with a 5-2 aggregate win against Kashima Antlers in the play-off final.

Playing under new head coach Michael Skibbe, Vissel overcame a busy schedule, which also took them to the Asian Champions League Elite semi-finals, to finish top of the J. League's West Division. After a tight run-in, they only pulled

100 Year Vision League... the tournament provided a bridge between the 2025 and 2026-27 campaigns

Player of the Season...Kashima Antlers badly missed goalkeeper Tomoki Hayakawa in the final

Final thrashing... Vissel Kobe players celebrate during their 5-0 win over Kashima Antlers

clear of second-placed Cerezo Osaka at the end of the campaign.

In the east, by contrast, defending J. League champions Antlers romped to victory with only one defeat in 90 minutes and finished on 45 points, eight clear of FC Tokyo, their closest rivals.

Antlers operated as a well-oiled machine, rarely spectacular but conceding only nine times in 18 games with a defensive quality that made them nearly invincible. Their one defeat in open play, as opposed to penalties, was a 2-1 loss to Tokyo Verdy in April.

That was the state of play until they met Vissel in the first leg of the final on May 30, where they were crushed 5-0. What happened? The simple answer was the World Cup.

With the national teams gathering, Antlers went into the final without two key players, Japan goalkeeper Tomoki Hayakawa and South Korea centre-back Kim Tae-hyeon. They lacked their usual cohesion at the back, and Vissel duly took advantage.

Vissel Kobe, J. League champions in 2023 and 2024, roared back to lift the title

Antlers recovered to win the second leg 2-0 but there was no coming back from the initial collapse. Third place overall was claimed by Cerezo, who defeated FC Tokyo 5-3 on aggregate in their play-off final.

The interim league produced several big changes of fortune from 2025. In the west, Arthur Papas' Cerezo rose from mid-table in 2025 to wind up as runners-up on goal difference ahead of Nagoya Grampus, whose even bigger jump under Mihailo Petrovic saw them rise from 16th nationwide to third in the west. Sanfrecce Hiroshima, fourth in 2025, were only fourth in the west this time around and seventh overall, their worst finish since 2021. Kyoto Sanga, third from top in 2025, dropped to third from bottom in the west and 15th overall.

In the east, too, Kashiwa Reysol, last year's runners-up, crashed to third from bottom, but the three Tokyo teams all performed strongly with FC Tokyo finishing second, Asian Champions League Elite finalists Machida Zelvia third, and Tokyo Verdy fifth. Yokohama F. Marinos again struggled, as did newly promoted sides Mito HollyHock and JEF United Chiba in the east and V-Varen Nagasaki in the west.

Vissel's victory in the One Hundred Year Vision League also earned them Japan's remaining direct slot in the 2026-27 Asian Champions League Elite alongside the 2025 champions Antlers, runners-up Reysol, and third-placed Sanga. Gamba Osaka have also been awarded a slot in the preliminary stage for their victory in the 2025-26 Asian Champions League Two, where they beat Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr in the final. Emperor's Cup winners Zelvia will represent Japan in the 2026-27 Asian Champions League Two.

Best XIs were announced separately for the east and west. Antlers' strong showing was reflected in the fact that they had seven of the 11 in the east with the remaining slots going to FC Tokyo (three) and Tokyo Verdy (one). Ryunosuke Sato, the 2025 J. League Young Player of the Year, had an especially big impact on his return to FC Tokyo following his loan at Fagiano Okayama.

In the west, where the competition was much tighter, the awards were also more evenly divided. Only two Vissel players, Brazilian centre-back Matheus Thuler and former Leeds United and Celtic midfielder Yosuke Ideguchi, made the cut, with four from Grampus. Antlers' Brazilian striker Leo Ceara, top scorer in the league in 2025, again claimed the Golden Boot with ten goals.

SEASON'S BEST

MANAGER OF THE SEASON
Michael Skibbe *(Vissel Kobe)*
The experienced 60-year-old German manager led Sanfrecce Hiroshima to the League Cup twice in four seasons between 2022 and 2025, but the One Hundred Year Vision League is his first senior league title.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON (EAST)
Tomoki Hayakawa
(Kashima Antlers)
Japan's back-up keeper and the 2025 J. League Player of the Year was once again a huge factor as Antlers conceded only nine times in 18 league games. He was sorely missed in the play-off final after leaving for the World Cup.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON (WEST)
Matheus Thuler *(Vissel Kobe)*
The Brazilian centre-back is the rock at the heart of the Vissel defence. Physically strong with delicate ball skills and an eye for goal, he also won the J. League with Vissel in 2023 and 2024.

YOUNG PLAYER OF THE SEASON (EAST)
Makoto Himeno
(JEF United Chiba)
The 17-year old wide midfielder scored on his debut in last year's promotion play-off and featured in 18 of JEF's 20 league matches.

YOUNG PLAYER OF THE SEASON (WEST)
Nelson Ishiwatari *(Cerezo Osaka)*
The 21-year old defensive midfield dynamo spent last season on loan at J2 club Iwaki, but returned to his parent club in 2026 and was nearly ever-present as Cerezo enjoyed their best campaign in years.

Cuba

STEVE MENARY

Cuban evolution

Faced with defections, economic sanctions and visa issues, Cuba has had to evolve in order to build a national team

Influential... Luis Paradela at the 2023 CONCACAF Gold Cup

The *Asociación de Fútbol de Cuba* (AFC) was founded 102 years ago, and the island was the first Caribbean nation to play at a World Cup finals, beating Romania on the way to the quarter-finals in 1938.

More recently, Cuba won the 2012 Caribbean Cup and reached the CONCACAF Gold Cup quarter-finals three times, lastly in 2015. These performances are remarkable given years of defections by players looking to escape a rapidly deteriorating economic situation on the island caused by years of US blockades.

Since the turn of the century, at least 26 Cuban footballers have defected. Cuba qualified for the last Gold Cup in 2023 but lost five players to defections, as well as all three group matches. Sanctions have since tightened, while visas remain a long-standing issue.

When attacking midfielder Luis Paradela joined USL Championship outfit Reno 1868 FC on loan from Guatemalan club Universidad de San Carlos in 2019, he was the first Cuban footballer to be issued with a US P-1A athlete visa. Paradela, now playing in Costa Rica but still a regular for Cuba, only played a handful of games in the US and the visa situation has since deteriorated.

Cuba had to forfeit their preliminary round fixture against French Guiana in the 2021 Gold Cup finals in the US as not all the party were issued visas.

Italian-born... Alessio Raballo in action for Cuba's Under-20 side

The US also routinely denies visa waivers for anyone travelling to Cuba. In June 2024, the Cayman Islands withdrew from a 2026 World Cup qualifier in Cuba due to concerns some players who study in the US may not be able to return to college. And it's not just football that has been affected; some Cubans were denied visas for this year's World Baseball Classic in the US.

Faced with waves of defections, the AFC sought to recruit players born on the island and living overseas, such as winger Onel Hernandez, then playing in the German second tier for Eintracht Braunschweig, and Norway-based forward Willian Pozo-Venta. Both left Cuba as small children, but were initially blocked from returning by the government. "I wasn't able to play before because you had to grow up in Cuba," says Pozo-Venta. "But in 2021, they opened up and you could represent the national team as long as you have a Cuban passport."

In 2021, the AFC called up 11 foreign-based players born in Cuba in a 26-man squad for matches in Guatemala and Curacao, including Pozo-Venta, Carlos Vazquez of Spanish side Alcorcon, Joel Apezteguia from Tre Fiori in San Marino and Hernandez, by then in the UK with Norwich City.

Pozo-Venta, now playing for Grorud in Norway's third tier and still involved with Cuba, adds: "The number of overseas players has continued to increase since I started, and they are now recruiting players whose parents are born in Cuba."

> **Since the turn of the century, at least 26 Cuban footballers have defected. Sanctions have since tightened, while visas remain a long-standing issue**

In 2025, Alessio Raballo and Camilo Pinillo became the first players not born in Cuba to be called up for the national team since the 1967 Pan American Games in Winnipeg, Canada. Defender Pinillo was born in Belgium and plays for Lierse, while Turin-born forward Raballo spent 2025-26 on loan at Cremonese from Torino and scored in a 2-0 win over Martinique in November. Both players also represented Cuba in last year's Under-20 World Cup, the island's first appearance in that tournament since 2013.

The two teenagers, who both have Cuban fathers, are among a Cuban diaspora of more than four million people and this shift in recruitment could open up a significant pool of players for the AFC going forward.

Tales from the 211

The Sweeper looks back at some of the more unusual stories from the 2025-26 season

Alpine home ...FC Vaduz's Rheinpark Stadion

VADUZ'S SWISS SUPER LEAGUE RETURN

As the only UEFA country without its own domestic league, Liechtenstein's seven clubs all compete as guests in neighbouring Switzerland. By far the biggest name in the septet is Vaduz, who made headlines not long ago by becoming the only club to ever qualify for the Conference League proper while playing in the second division domestically. Next season, however, they will be swapping the Challenge League for the Super League, having secured a return to the top table following a five-year absence.

Interestingly, Vaduz have to pay an annual fee – reportedly in the range of CHF 1.4 million in their most recent top-flight season – for the privilege of rubbing shoulders with Switzerland's elite. Crucially, the club can neither qualify for continental competition via their league position (their only route remains the domestic cup, which they have won a world-record 52 times), nor be crowned as champions in the event they finish first. And that prospect is not as unlikely as it might sound, after Thun became Swiss champions as a promoted club this season.

EUROPE'S WORST TOP-FLIGHT CLUB

There are more than 700 top-flight clubs across the 55 UEFA nations – none of which had a worse season than Shkupi of North Macedonia. Champions only four years ago, the capital club were handed a three-window transfer ban in December 2024 – a ruling that coincided with main benefactor Olgun Aydin pulling his funding and leaving the team.

Those financial problems in turn led to a mass exodus from the club, who were also not helped by infrastructural issues that resulted in forfeitures and home games being played at neutral venues. Ultimately, they picked up only a single point all season and conceded 130 goals in total – more than twice as many as any domestic rival.

And yet there is a top-tier team in Europe who finished the season with fewer points than Shkupi. Murata registered one victory and four draws in San Marino but ended the campaign on -2 points having been docked nine points due to administrative irregularities. They will remain in the division next season, however: along with Gibraltar, San Marino is one of only two UEFA members to have only one division and therefore no relegation.

RUSSIA'S YOUTUBE TEAM IN CYPRUS

When Russian footballer-turned-influencer Yevgeny Savin condemned the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, he quickly became persona non grata in his homeland. Unwilling to abandon FC Krasava – the team he had founded and named after his YouTube channel – Savin sought a fresh start in Cyprus, where he purchased a club called Ypsonas and rebranded them. Last summer, after three years of hard work, they were promoted to the Cypriot First Division.

With financial resources heavily dwarfed by the biggest clubs on the island and without a stadium meeting league requirements – forcing their home games to be relocated to Larnaca – Krasava were widely expected to struggle. But they defied expectations to retain their top-tier status, ultimately finishing five points clear of the drop zone. More remarkable than this sporting success, however, is the club's off-pitch impact, uniting Cyprus's roughly 100,000-strong population of Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian expatriates amid ongoing wartime tensions.

AJACCIO'S ROLLER-COASTER RIDE

It has been a harrowing time for Corsican football. While Bastia ended the 2025-26 campaign with relegation from Ligue 2, fellow islanders Ajaccio were demoted from that division before the season had even begun. Amid mounting debts, they were first administratively relegated to the third tier last summer – then excluded from French national competitions altogether and denied professional status for the first time in 27 years.

Despite dropping down to the seventh tier, several ex-players – such as Riad Nouri and Cedric Avinel – returned to the club in their hour of need. But the big coup was striker Andy Delort, who had been playing Ligue 1 football with Montpellier the previous season. A former Algeria international with two goals in 15 appearances for the North African country, Delort also played in the English Championship for Wigan Athletic over a decade ago, and his goals were key to Ajaccio's promotion to the sixth tier this term as the club looks to get back to the upper echelons of French football.

The Sweeper

To the rescue...Andy Delort was a Ligue 1 striker last year

Listen to the sweeper PODCAST
Apple
Spotify
the sweeper podcast with Lee Wingate & Paul Watson

Club Football

EUROPE

2025-26 FA CUP

Final

May 16 – Wembley
Chelsea 0
Manchester City 1 (Semenyo 72)

2025-26 SCOTTISH CUP

Final

May 23 – Glasgow
Celtic 3 (Maeda 19, Engels 36, Iheanacho 73)
Dunfermline Athletic 1 (Cooper 80)

2025-26 SPANISH CUP

Final

Apr 18 – Seville
Atletico Madrid 2 (Lookman 18, Alvarez 83)
Real Sociedad 2 (Barrenetxea 1, Oyarzabal 45+1 pen)
After Extra-Time; Real Sociedad win 4-3 on pens

2025-26 ITALIAN CUP

Final

May 13 – Rome
Lazio 0
Internazionale 2 (Marusic 14 og, Lautaro 35)

2025-26 GERMAN CUP

Final

May 23 – Berlin
Bayern Munich 3 (Kane 55, 80, 90+2 pen)
Stuttgart 0

2025-26 FRENCH CUP

Final

May 24 – Saint-Denis
Lens 3 (Thauvin 25, Edouard 42, Sima 78)
Nice 1 (Coulibaly 45+3)

2025-26 PORTUGUESE CUP

Final

May 24 – Oeiras
Sporting 1 (Suarez 54)
Torreense 2 (Zohi 4, Stopira 113 pen)
After Extra-Time

2025-26 DUTCH CUP

Final

Apr 19 – Rotterdam
AZ 5 (De Wit 32, Mijnans 67, Koopmeiners 73, Smit 90+1, Parrott 90+5)
NEC 1 (Ogawa 78)

2025-26 EFL PLAY-OFFS

Championship

Semi-Final – 1st Leg

May 8 – Hull
Hull City 0
Millwall 0

May 9 – Middlesbrough
Middlesbrough 0
Southampton 0

Semi-Final – 2nd Leg

May 11 – London
Millwall 0
Hull City 2 (Belloumi 64, Gelhardt 79)
Hull City win 2-0 on aggregate

May 12 – Southampton
Southampton 2 (Stewart 45+1, Charles 116)
Middlesbrough 1 (McGree 5)
After Extra-Time; Southampton win 2-1 on agg
Middlesbrough later advanced via walkover

Final

May 23 – Wembley
Hull City 1 (McBurnie 90+5)
Middlesbrough 0

League One

Semi-Final – 1st Leg

May 9 – Stevenage
Stevenage 0
Stockport County 1 (Osborn 90+4)

May 9 – Bolton
Bolton Wanderers 1 (Cozier-Duberry 60)
Bradford City 0

Semi-Final – 2nd Leg

May 13 – Stockport
Stockport County 2 (Barry 14, Wootton 28)
Stevenage 0
Stockport County win 3-0 on aggregate

May 13 – Bradford
Bradford City 0
Bolton Wanderers 1 (Simons 81)
Bolton Wanderers win 2-0 on aggregate

Final

May 24 – Wembley
Stockport County 1 (Sidibeh 29)
Bolton Wanderers 4 (Rodrigues 3, 90+4 pen, Wootton 64 og, Dalby 81)

League Two

Semi-Final – 1st Leg

May 10 – Cleethorpes
Grimsby Town 1 (Staunton 1)
Salford City 2 (Cesay 4, Oluwo 40)

May 10 – Nottingham
Chesterfield 0
Notts County 1 (Luker 28)

Semi-Final – 2nd Leg

May 15 – Salford
Salford City 2 (Udoh 53, Cesay 117)
Grimsby Town 2 (Green 74, Kabia 78)
After Extra-Time; Salford win 4-3 on aggregate

May 15 – Nottingham
Notts County 0
Chesterfield 0
Notts County win 1-0 on aggregate

Final

May 25 – Wembley
Salford City 0
Notts County 3 (Jatta 32, Ness 45, Jones 70)

ALBANIA

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vllaznia	36	18	9	9	42	27	63
Elbasani	36	17	11	8	48	37	62
Egnatia	36	16	9	11	42	34	57
Dinamo City	36	12	13	11	43	33	49
Partizani	36	13	9	14	38	48	48
Tirana	36	11	11	14	36	46	44
Vora	36	10	12	14	39	40	42
Teuta*	36	9	15	12	32	37	42
Bylis (R)	36	10	11	15	38	50	41
Flamurtari (R)	36	8	12	16	39	45	36

• *Top four advance to next round; points halved and rounded down*
**Enter promotion-relegation play-off*
May 16: Teuta 1-0 Pogradeci

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egnatia (C)	3	3	0	0	8	1	37
Elbasani	3	2	0	1	5	5	37
Vllaznia	3	0	0	3	2	6	31
Dinamo City	3	1	0	2	2	5	27

ANDORRA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter Club d'Escaldes (C)	24	17	3	4	47	24	54
UE Santa Coloma	24	15	6	3	45	13	51
Ranger's	24	15	3	6	46	22	48
FC Santa Coloma	24	13	5	6	45	20	44
Atletic Club d'Escaldes	24	10	4	10	31	26	34
Penya Encarnada	24	7	3	14	19	41	24
Ordino	24	6	4	14	27	42	22
Carroi	24	4	5	15	15	55	17
Esperanca*	24	2	5	17	15	47	11
Pas de la Casa (R)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

**Enter promotion-relegation play-off*
May 23:
Sporting Club d'Escaldes 1-3 Esperanca
May 27:
Esperanca 2-0 Sporting Club d'Escaldes (agg 5-1)

ARMENIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ararat-Armenia (C)	27	18	6	3	50	25	60
Noah	27	16	8	3	61	19	56
Pyunik	27	17	4	6	37	18	55
Alashkert	27	16	5	6	42	23	53
Urartu	27	14	7	6	43	26	49
Van	27	9	4	14	27	40	31
BKMA	27	4	11	12	30	42	23
Gandzasar Kapan	27	5	6	16	20	41	21
Ararat Yerevan	27	3	4	20	21	63	13
Shirak (R)	27	2	7	18	17	51	13

AUSTRIA

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sturm Graz	22	12	2	8	33	26	38
Red Bull Salzburg	22	10	7	5	42	26	37
LASK	22	11	4	7	32	30	37
Austria Vienna	22	11	3	8	34	30	36
Rapid Vienna	22	9	6	7	26	25	33
Hartberg	22	8	9	5	29	24	33
WSG Tirol	22	8	7	7	31	30	31
SCR Altach	22	7	8	7	22	23	29
SV Ried	22	8	4	10	26	30	28
Wolfsberger	22	7	5	10	31	32	26
Grazer AK	22	4	8	10	22	36	20
Blau-Weiss Linz	22	4	3	15	20	36	15

• *Top six advance to championship round, bottom six enter relegation round; points halved and rounded down*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LASK (C)	32	17	7	8	56	42	39
Sturm Graz	32	16	8	8	51	35	37
Red Bull Salzburg	32	13	9	10	56	41	29
Austria Vienna	32	14	5	13	45	50	29
Rapid Vienna*	32	12	8	12	36	41	27
Hartberg	32	10	12	10	40	40	25

**Advance to European play-offs*

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
SV Ried*	32	12	6	14	38	42	28
Wolfsberger*	32	11	8	13	41	42	28
SCR Altach	32	10	12	10	36	39	27
Grazer AK	32	9	10	13	42	45	27
WSG Tirol	32	10	10	12	40	52	24
Blau-Weiss Linz (R)	32	8	5	19	37	49	21

**Advance to European play-offs*

Play-Off Semi-Final
May 19: SV Ried 2-1 Wolfsberger

Play-Off Final
May 22: SV Ried 2-1 Rapid Vienna
May 25: Rapid Vienna 3-0 SV Ried (agg 4-2)

AZERBAIJAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sabah (C)	33	24	6	3	75	25	78
Qarabag	33	21	6	6	71	27	69
Turan Tovuz	33	17	8	8	44	27	59
Neftchi	33	16	11	6	57	32	59
Zira	33	13	14	6	43	36	53
Araz-Nakhchivan	33	13	7	13	44	58	46
Sumgayit	33	12	5	16	45	49	41
Shamakhi	33	9	11	13	31	40	38
Imishli	33	7	13	13	23	43	34
Kapaz	33	8	3	22	25	61	27
Gabala*	33	7	6	20	32	49	27
Karvan (R)	33	3	6	24	23	66	15

**Enter promotion-relegation play-off*
May 28: Gabala 2-0 Mingacevir

BELGIUM

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Union SG	30	19	9	2	50	17	66
Club Brugge	30	20	3	7	59	36	63
Sint-Truiden	30	18	3	9	47	35	57
Gent	30	13	6	11	49	43	45
Mechelen	30	12	9	9	39	37	45
Anderlecht	30	12	8	10	43	39	44
Genk	30	11	9	10	46	47	42
Standard Liege	30	11	7	12	27	35	40
Westerlo	30	10	9	11	36	40	39
Antwerp	30	9	8	13	31	32	35
Charleroi	30	9	7	14	38	42	34
OH Leuven	30	9	7	14	32	43	34
Zulte Waregem	30	8	8	14	38	47	32
Cercle Brugge	30	7	10	13	39	47	31
La Louviere	30	6	13	11	30	37	31
Dender EH	30	3	10	17	24	51	19

• *Top six advance to championship round, teams 7th to 12th enter European play-offs, bottom four enter relegation round. Points halved and rounded up for championship round and European play-offs, but carried over in full for relegation round*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Club Brugge (C)	10	8	1	1	32	9	57
Union SG	10	6	2	2	16	10	53
Sint-Truiden	10	4	2	4	14	11	43
Anderlecht	10	3	2	5	16	23	33
Gent*	10	0	6	4	4	14	29
Mechelen	10	1	3	6	9	24	29

**Advance to European play-off final*

European Play-Offs

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Genk*	10	4	5	1	11	6	38
Standard Liege	10	5	2	3	17	11	37
Charleroi	10	5	2	3	12	8	34
Westerlo	10	4	1	5	14	17	33
Antwerp	10	4	1	5	12	16	31
OH Leuven	10	1	3	6	9	17	23

**Advance to European play-off final*
May 31:
Gent 1-1 Genk (*AET, Gent win 5-4 on pens*)

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zulte Waregem	6	5	1	0	15	6	48
Cercle Brugge	6	3	1	2	14	11	41
La Louviere	6	1	0	5	5	13	34
Dender EH* (R)	6	2	0	4	7	11	25

**Enter promotion-relegation play-offs*

Quarter-Finals
Apr 23: Lommel 3-0 RFC Liege;
Patro Eisden Maasmechelen 1-1 Beerschot
Apr 27:
Beerschot 3-2 PE Maasmechelen (agg 4-3, *AET*);
RFC Liege 1-2 Lommel (agg 1-5)

Semi-Finals
May 2: Lommel 3-1 Beerschot
May 9: Beerschot 1-3 Lommel (agg 2-6)

Final
May 17: Lommel 3-2 Dender EH
May 23: Dender EH 0-0 Lommel (agg 2-3)

BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Borac Banja Luka (C)	36	27	5	4	76	20	86
Zrinjski Mostar	36	21	8	7	48	25	71
Sarajevo	36	19	8	9	54	37	65
Velez Mostar	36	14	9	13	36	35	51
Siroki Brijeg	36	11	12	13	37	48	45
Zeljeznicar	36	10	12	14	34	37	42
Radnik Bijeljina	36	8	11	17	27	45	35
Sloga Doboj	36	8	10	18	21	46	34
Posusje (R)	36	8	10	18	25	41	34
Rudar Prijedor (R)	36	7	9	20	31	55	30

BULGARIA

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Levski Sofia	30	22	4	4	64	22	70
Ludogorets	30	17	9	4	57	20	60
CSKA 1948	30	18	5	7	50	31	59
CSKA Sofia	30	16	8	6	43	23	56
Lokomotiv Plovdiv	30	11	13	6	30	33	46
Cherno More	30	11	11	8	33	26	44
Arda	30	12	8	10	33	27	44

Botev Plovdiv	30	11	7	12	40	37	40
Slavia Sofia	30	10	9	11	36	33	39
Botev Vratsa	30	9	11	10	24	26	38
Lokomotiv Sofia	30	9	10	11	40	39	37
Spartak Varna	30	5	12	13	25	50	27
Dobrudzha	30	7	5	18	23	43	26
Septemvri Sofia	30	7	5	18	25	58	26
Beroe	30	4	11	15	19	44	23
Montana	30	3	8	19	15	45	17

• *Top four advance to championship round, teams 5th to 8th enter European round, bottom eight enter relegation round; points carried over in full*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Levski Sofia (C)	36	25	6	5	71	25	81
CSKA 1948	36	20	7	9	54	35	67
Ludogorets*	36	19	10	7	61	25	67
CSKA Sofia	36	18	9	9	47	30	63

**Advance to European play-off*

European Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lokomotiv Plovdiv*	36	14	13	9	36	41	55
Arda	36	15	9	12	42	34	54
Cherno More	36	14	12	10	40	34	54
Botev Plovdiv	36	13	7	16	49	45	46

Advance to European play-off

May 29: Ludogorets 0-0 Lokomotiv Plovdiv (*AET, Ludogorets win 3-1 on pens*)

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Botev Vratsa	37	13	14	10	36	32	53
Lokomotiv Sofia	37	11	14	12	51	48	47
Slavia Sofia	37	12	10	15	42	44	46
Spartak Varna	37	8	13	16	35	57	37
Septemvri Sofia*	37	9	9	19	32	64	36
Beroe (R)	37	7	13	17	28	52	34
Dobrudzha (R)	37	8	7	22	28	52	31
Montana (R)	37	4	11	22	21	55	23

**Enter promotion-relegation play-off*

May 28: Septemvri Sofia 2-1 Yantra

CROATIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo Zagreb (C)	36	27	5	4	93	28	86
Hajduk Split	36	20	8	8	61	36	68
Varazdin	36	15	9	12	47	46	54
Rijeka	36	14	11	11	49	36	53
Lokomotiva	36	10	14	12	40	52	44
Istra 1961	36	12	7	17	39	50	43
Gorica	36	11	8	17	40	48	41
Slaven Belupo	36	10	11	15	46	61	41
Osijek	36	8	11	17	27	49	35
Vukovar 1991 (R)	36	6	10	20	37	73	28

CYPRUS

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Omonia	26	19	4	3	63	17	61
AEK Larnaca	26	16	5	5	49	22	53
Apollon Limassol	26	16	5	5	36	22	53
Pafos	26	16	3	7	53	24	51
APOEL	26	13	6	7	45	27	45
Aris Limassol	26	12	7	7	48	26	43
Omonia Aradippou	26	10	4	12	23	31	34
AEL Limassol	26	10	3	13	31	38	33
Anorthosis Famagusta	26	7	11	8	23	33	32
Krasava	26	8	4	14	26	36	28
Olympiakos Nicosia	26	6	10	10	22	37	28
Akritas Chlorakas	26	7	5	14	23	48	26
Ethnikos Achna	26	7	2	17	25	44	23
Enosis Neon Paralimni	26	0	1	25	5	67	1

• *Top six advance to championship round, bottom eight enter relegation round; points carried over in full*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Omonia (C)	36	27	6	3	88	24	87
AEK Larnaca	36	20	9	7	62	33	69
Apollon Limassol	36	20	7	9	52	41	67
Pafos	36	18	8	10	66	38	62
APOEL	36	15	7	14	53	45	52
Aris Limassol	36	14	9	13	61	45	51

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anorthosis Famagusta	33	11	12	10	35	40	45
AEL Limassol	33	13	5	15	41	46	44
Omonia Aradippou	33	12	6	15	31	42	42
Krasava	33	11	7	15	36	44	40
Olympiakos Nicosia	33	10	10	13	32	44	40
Akritas Chlorakas (R)	33	10	5	18	31	58	35
Ethnikos Achna (R)	33	10	3	20	34	53	33
Enosis Neon Paralimni (R)	33	1	2	30	11	80	5

CZECH REPUBLIC

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slavia Prague	30	21	8	1	63	23	71
Sparta Prague	30	19	6	5	60	33	63
Viktoria Plzen	30	15	8	7	50	34	53
Jablonec	30	15	6	9	41	33	51
Hradec Kralove	30	14	7	9	43	34	49
Slovan Liberec	30	12	10	8	43	30	46
Sigma Olomouc	30	12	7	11	34	34	43
Pardubice	30	11	8	11	39	46	41
Karvina	30	12	3	15	43	51	39
Bohemians 1905	30	10	6	14	26	35	36
Mlada Boleslav	30	8	11	11	44	52	35
Zlin	30	9	7	14	37	48	34
Teplice	30	6	11	13	29	38	29
Dukla Prague	30	4	11	15	20	42	23
Slovacko	30	5	8	17	26	45	23
Banik Ostrava	30	5	7	18	25	45	22

• *Top six advance to championship round, teams 7th to 10th enter middle group play-offs, bottom six enter relegation round; points carried over in full*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slavia Prague (C)	35	24	8	3	74	31	80
Sparta Prague	35	23	7	5	69	34	76
Viktoria Plzen	35	18	9	8	60	38	63
Hradec Kralove	35	16	8	11	50	41	56
Jablonec	35	16	7	12	45	47	55
Slovan Liberec	35	12	10	13	45	39	46

Play-Offs First Round

May 2: Karvina 1-2 Pardubice; Bohemians 1905 1-3 Sigma Olomouc

May 10: Pardubice 1-3 Karvina (agg 3-4, *AET*); Sigma Olomouc 1-2 Bohemians (agg 4-3, *AET*)

Play-Offs Second Round

May 16: Karvina 1-3 Sigma Olomouc

May 25: Sigma Olomouc 4-0 Karvina (agg 7-1)

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Teplice	35	10	12	13	40	42	42
Zlin	35	11	8	16	43	56	41
Mlada Boleslav	35	9	13	13	49	57	40
Slovacko*	35	7	9	19	30	51	30
Banik Ostrava*	35	7	8	20	32	49	29
Dukla Prague (R)	35	5	11	19	23	51	26

**Enter promotion-relegation play-offs*

May 26-27: Banik Ostrava 3-0 Taborsko; Artis Brno 1-4 Slovacko

May 30-31: Taborsko 0-5 Banik Ostrava (agg 0-8); Slovacko 3-0 Artis Brno (agg 7-1)

DENMARK

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AGF	22	15	5	2	46	23	50
Midtjylland	22	13	7	2	58	23	46
Sonderjyske	22	10	6	6	34	28	36
Brondby	22	10	4	8	31	22	34
Viborg	22	10	3	9	37	35	33
Nordsjaelland	22	10	1	11	37	39	31
Copenhagen	22	8	5	9	35	34	29
OB	22	7	6	9	36	46	27
Randers	22	7	5	10	22	27	26
Fredericia	22	7	3	12	30	49	24
Silkeborg	22	5	4	13	24	45	19
Vejle	22	3	5	14	26	45	14

• *Top six advance to championship round, bottom six enter relegation round; points carried over in full*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AGF (C)	32	19	10	3	62	32	67
Midtjylland	32	16	12	4	72	36	60
Nordsjaelland	32	15	5	12	51	46	50
Brondby*	32	13	6	13	44	35	45
Viborg	32	13	5	14	49	51	44
Sonderjyske	32	12	8	12	44	49	44

**Advance to European play-off*

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Copenhagen*	32	15	6	11	67	44	51
OB	32	11	8	13	51	60	41
Silkeborg	32	10	6	16	41	67	36
Randers	32	9	8	15	33	47	35
Fredericia (R)	32	9	7	16	45	68	34
Vejle (R)	32	5	9	18	36	60	24

**Advance to European play-off*

May 21: Brondby 1-3 Copenhagen (*AET*)

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arsenal (C)	38	26	7	5	71	27	85
Man City	38	23	9	6	77	35	78
Man United	38	20	11	7	69	50	71
Aston Villa	38	19	8	11	56	49	65
Liverpool	38	17	9	12	63	53	60
Bournemouth	38	13	18	7	58	54	57
Sunderland	38	14	12	12	42	48	54
Brighton	38	14	11	13	52	46	53
Brentford	38	14	11	13	55	52	53
Chelsea	38	14	10	14	58	52	52
Fulham	38	15	7	16	47	51	52
Newcastle	38	14	7	17	53	55	49
Everton	38	13	10	15	47	50	49
Leeds United	38	11	14	13	49	56	47
Crystal Palace	38	11	12	15	41	51	45
Nott'm Forest	38	11	11	16	48	51	44
Spurs	38	10	11	17	48	57	41
West Ham (R)	38	10	9	19	46	65	39
Burnley (R)	38	4	10	24	38	75	22
Wolves (R)	38	3	11	24	27	68	20

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSG (C)	34	24	4	6	74	29	76
Lens	34	22	4	8	66	35	70
Lille	34	18	7	9	52	37	61
Lyon	34	18	6	10	53	40	60
Marseille	34	18	5	11	63	45	59
Rennes	34	17	8	9	59	50	59
Monaco	34	16	6	12	60	54	54
Strasbourg	34	15	8	11	58	47	53
Toulouse	34	12	9	13	47	46	45
Lorient	34	11	12	11	48	51	45
Paris FC	34	11	11	12	47	50	44
Brest	34	10	9	15	43	55	39
Angers	34	9	9	16	29	48	36
Le Havre	34	7	14	13	32	44	35
Auxerre	34	8	10	16	34	44	34
Nice*	34	7	11	16	37	60	32
Nantes (R)	34	5	9	20	29	52	24
Metz (R)	34	3	8	23	32	76	17

**Enter promotion-relegation play-off*

May 26: Saint-Etienne 0-0 Nice

May 29: Nice 4-1 Saint-Etienne (agg 4-1)

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern Munich (C)	34	28	5	1	122	36	89
B. Dortmund	34	22	7	5	70	34	73
RB Leipzig	34	20	5	9	66	47	65
Stuttgart	34	18	8	8	71	49	62
Hoffenheim	34	18	7	9	65	52	61
B. Leverkusen	34	17	8	9	68	47	59
Freiburg	34	13	8	13	51	57	47
E. Frankfurt	34	11	11	12	61	65	44
Augsburg	34	12	7	15	45	61	43
Mainz	34	10	10	14	44	53	40
Union Berlin	34	10	9	15	44	58	39
B. M'Gladbach	34	9	11	14	42	53	38
Hamburg	34	9	11	14	40	54	38
Cologne	34	7	11	16	49	63	32
Werder Bremen	34	8	8	18	37	60	32
Wolfsburg* (R)	34	7	8	19	45	69	29
Heidenheim (R)	34	6	8	20	41	72	26
St Pauli (R)	34	6	8	20	29	60	26

**Enter promotion-relegation play-off*

May 21: Wolfsburg 0-0 Paderborn

May 25: Paderborn 2-1 Wolfsburg (agg 2-1, *AET*)

GIBRALTAR

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lincoln Red Imps	22	19	2	1	79	14	59
St Joseph's	22	19	1	2	90	10	58
Mons Calpe	22	15	1	6	55	24	46
Europa	22	15	1	6	44	16	46
Lions Gibraltar	22	12	2	8	47	34	38
Lynx	22	10	4	8	34	33	34
FC Magpies	22	8	2	12	22	37	26
Europa Point	22	7	1	14	31	61	22
College 1975	22	3	5	14	15	45	14
Glacis United	22	3	3	16	18	57	12
Hound Dogs	22	1	5	16	10	66	8
Manchester 62*	22	6	1	15	29	77	7

• *Top six advance to championship round; points carried over in full*

**Deducted 12 points*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lincoln Red Imps (C)	27	23	3	1	89	17	72
St Joseph's	27	20	3	4	96	17	63
Europa	27	18	2	7	54	20	56
Mons Calpe	27	18	1	8	66	35	55
Lions Gibraltar	27	13	4	10	53	44	43
Lynx	27	10	4	13	38	45	34

GREECE

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AEK Athens	26	18	6	2	49	17	60
Olympiacos	26	17	7	2	45	11	58
PAOK	26	17	6	3	52	17	57
Panathinaikos	26	14	7	5	44	26	49
Levadiakos	26	12	6	8	51	37	42
OFI	26	10	2	14	34	45	32
Volos	26	9	4	13	26	38	31
Aris	26	6	12	8	20	27	30
Atromitos	26	7	8	11	26	30	29
Kifisia	26	6	9	11	32	42	27
Panetolikos	26	7	5	14	24	38	26
AEL	26	4	11	11	22	39	23
Panserraikos	26	4	5	17	16	55	17
Asteras Tripolis	26	3	8	15	22	41	17

• *Top four advance to championship round, teams 5th to 8th enter European play-offs, bottom six enter relegation round; points carried over in full*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AEK Athens (C)	32	21	9	2	57	20	72
Olympiacos	32	19	9	4	51	17	66
PAOK	32	18	10	4	59	25	64
Panathinaikos	32	14	10	8	47	33	52

European Play-Offs

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Aris	32	11	13	8	34	32	31
Levadiakos	32	15	7	10	63	47	31
OFI	32	12	3	17	43	55	23
Volos	32	9	5	18	33	55	17

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atromitos	36	12	10	14	49	42	46
Kifisia	36	9	14	13	40	51	41
Asteras Tripolis	36	8	12	16	36	49	36
Panetolikos	36	9	9	18	35	51	36
AEL (R)	36	5	15	16	34	56	30
Panserraikos (R)	36	7	8	21	25	73	29

HUNGARY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gyor (C)	33	20	9	4	65	30	69
Ferencvaros	33	21	5	7	67	31	68
Paks	33	15	8	10	63	46	53
Debrecen	33	14	11	8	51	41	53
Zalaegerszeg	33	13	9	11	49	43	48
Puskas Akademia	33	13	7	13	43	43	46
Ujpest	33	11	7	15	48	57	40
Kisvarda	33	11	7	15	36	49	40
Nyiregyhaza	33	10	10	13	47	57	40
MTK	33	9	11	13	55	62	38
Diosgyor (R)	33	6	10	17	39	65	28
Kazincbarcika (R)	33	6	4	23	31	70	22

ISRAEL

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hapoel Be'er Sheva	26	18	5	3	58	25	59
Beitar Jerusalem	26	17	6	3	61	29	57
Maccabi Tel Aviv	26	14	7	5	55	32	49
Hapoel Tel Aviv*	26	15	6	5	46	26	49
Maccabi Haifa	26	11	9	6	50	28	42
Hapoel Petah Tikva	26	9	10	7	41	36	37
Maccabi Netanya	26	10	5	11	45	55	35
Bnei Sakhnin	26	8	8	10	27	35	32
Ironi Kiryat Shmona	26	7	6	13	37	46	27
Hapoel Haifa	26	6	7	13	31	44	25
Ashdod	26	5	9	12	32	50	24
Hapoel Jerusalem	26	4	9	13	22	37	21
Ironi Tiberias**	26	7	6	13	32	52	19
Maccabi Bnei Reineh	26	3	3	20	17	59	12

• *Top six advance to championship round, bottom eight enter relegation round; points carried over in full*

**Deducted 2 points **Deducted 8 points*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hapoel Be'er Sheva (C)	36	24	7	5	79	38	79
Beitar Jerusalem	36	22	10	4	78	40	76
Maccabi Tel Aviv	36	19	9	8	72	46	66
Hapoel Tel Aviv*	36	18	8	10	55	35	60
Maccabi Haifa	36	15	10	11	66	47	55
Hapoel Petah Tikva	36	9	13	14	48	57	40

**Deducted 2 points*

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maccabi Netanya	33	14	6	13	59	63	48
Ironi Kiryat Shmona	33	11	7	15	50	53	40
Ironi Tiberias*	33	12	8	13	45	56	36
Hapoel Haifa	33	8	10	15	39	51	34
Bnei Sakhnin	33	8	10	15	28	49	34
Hapoel Jerusalem	33	7	10	16	26	43	31
Ashdod (R)	33	6	10	17	38	62	28
Maccabi Bnei Reineh (R)	33	6	4	23	26	69	22

*Deducted 8 points

ITALY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter (C)	38	27	6	5	89	35	87
Napoli	38	23	7	8	58	36	76
Roma	38	23	4	11	59	31	73
Como	38	20	11	7	65	29	71
Milan	38	20	10	8	53	35	70
Juventus	38	19	12	7	61	34	69
Atalanta	38	15	14	9	51	36	59
Bologna	38	16	8	14	49	46	56
Lazio	38	14	12	12	41	40	54
Udinese	38	14	8	16	45	48	50
Sassuolo	38	14	7	17	46	50	49
Torino	38	12	9	17	44	63	45
Parma	38	11	12	15	28	46	45
Cagliari	38	11	10	17	40	53	43
Fiorentina	38	9	15	14	41	50	42
Genoa	38	10	11	17	41	51	41
Lecce	38	10	8	20	28	50	38
Cremonese (R)	38	8	10	20	32	57	34
Hellas Verona (R)	38	3	12	23	25	61	21
Pisa (R)	38	2	12	24	26	71	18

KOSOVO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Drita (C)	36	20	6	10	50	35	66
Malisheva	36	18	5	13	58	50	59
Ballkani	36	17	7	12	61	41	58
Dukagjini	36	13	12	11	42	36	51
Gjilani	36	14	9	13	47	48	51
Drenica	36	15	5	16	46	55	50
Prishtina	36	13	10	13	52	51	49
Llapi*	36	13	10	13	46	50	49
Ferizaj (R)	36	9	9	18	40	55	36
Prishtina e Re (R)	36	8	7	21	39	60	31

*Enter promotion-relegation play-off

Jun 6: Dinamo Ferizaj 0-2 Llapi

LIECHTENSTEIN

2025-26 Liechtenstein Cup

Pre-Qualifier

Aug 12-14: Ruggell III A 4-1 Balzers III; Ruggell III B 1-7 Eschen/Mauren II; Eschen/Mauren III 1-5 Vaduz III (*AET*)

Round of 16

Sep 17-19: Triesen II 0-4 Balzers; Triesenberg II 0-12 Vaduz; Balzers II 0-4 Eschen/Mauren II; Schaan 1-4 Ruggell; Ruggell II 1-3 Triesen; Ruggell III A 3-7 Vaduz III (*AET*)

Sep 24: Schaan II 0-6 Triesenberg

Oct 15: Vaduz II 0-0 Eschen/Mauren (*AET, Eschen/Mauren win 4-3 on pens*)

Quarter-Finals

Oct 29: Vaduz III 2-3 Triesen; Ruggell 0-1 Eschen/Mauren

Nov 4-5: Triesenberg 1-5 Vaduz; Eschen/Mauren II 1-4 Balzers

Semi-Finals

Apr 14-15: Balzers 2-4 Vaduz; Triesen 1-11 Eschen/Mauren

Final

May 5: Vaduz 4-3 Eschen/Mauren

LUXEMBOURG

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atert Bissen (C)	30	20	5	5	70	27	65
Differdange 03	30	19	8	3	63	22	65
Mondorf-les-Bains	30	19	3	8	51	24	60
UNA Strassen	30	17	7	6	57	26	58
F91 Dudelange	30	17	7	6	59	38	58
Jeunesse Esch	30	10	10	10	35	34	40
Racing Union	30	11	7	12	48	50	40
Kaerjeng 97	30	11	5	14	43	48	38
Hostert	30	10	6	14	35	56	36
Victoria Rosport	30	10	5	15	33	50	35
Progres Niederkorn	30	9	7	14	44	47	34
Swift Hesperange	30	9	5	16	31	46	32
Jeunesse Canach* (R)	30	9	4	17	29	44	31
Mamer 32* (R)	30	8	5	17	33	59	29
Union Titus Petange (R)	30	6	7	17	26	49	25
Rodange (R)	30	6	7	17	28	65	25

*Enter promotion-relegation play-offs

May 31-Jun 1: Mamer 32 0-0 Wiltz 71 (*AET, Wiltz 71 win 5-4 on pens*); Jeunesse Canach 1-1 Residence Walferdange (*AET, Residence Walferdange win 6-5 on pens*)

MALTA

Opening Round First Stage

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Floriana	11	7	2	2	17	11	23
Hamrun Spartans	11	6	4	1	15	6	22
Valletta	11	6	4	1	16	8	22
Sliema Wanderers	11	5	4	2	16	14	19
Marsaxlokk	11	5	3	3	14	11	18
Birkirkara	11	4	4	3	12	8	16
Hibernians	11	4	3	4	20	18	15
Gzira United	11	3	4	4	14	18	13
Mosta	11	3	2	6	13	19	11
Zabbar St Patrick	11	2	4	5	11	14	10
Tarxien Rainbows	11	1	2	8	8	21	5
Naxxar Lions	11	1	2	8	10	18	5

• *Top six advance to top six round, bottom six enter bottom six round; points carried over in full*

Opening Round Top Six Stage

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hamrun Spartans (W)	16	10	4	2	26	10	34
Floriana	16	10	3	3	23	15	33
Valletta	16	8	5	3	20	11	29
Sliema Wanderers	16	7	5	4	21	19	26
Marsaxlokk	16	7	4	5	20	16	25
Birkirkara	16	4	4	8	15	22	16

Opening Round Bottom Six Stage

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hibernians	16	6	5	5	29	25	23
Gzira United	16	6	4	6	21	26	22
Zabbar St Patrick	16	3	7	6	20	22	16
Mosta	16	4	4	8	20	26	16
Naxxar Lions	16	4	3	9	18	25	15
Tarxien Rainbows	16	1	4	11	13	29	7

Closing Round First Stage

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Floriana	11	7	4	0	20	7	25
Hamrun Spartans	11	6	4	1	16	4	22
Marsaxlokk	11	5	4	2	12	12	19
Naxxar Lions	11	5	3	3	20	18	18
Valletta	11	4	5	2	16	7	17
Gzira United	11	5	2	4	14	12	17
Sliema Wanderers	11	4	4	3	10	11	16
Birkirkara	11	3	4	4	12	12	13
Hibernians	11	3	2	6	11	17	11
Zabbar St Patrick	11	2	4	5	13	15	10
Tarxien Rainbows	11	1	3	7	9	21	6
Mosta	11	1	1	9	7	24	4

• *Top six advance to top six round, bottom six enter bottom six round; points carried over in full*

Closing Round Top Six Stage

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Floriana (W)	16	11	4	1	28	12	37
Marsaxlokk	16	9	4	3	22	20	31
Hamrun Spartans	16	8	4	4	26	11	28
Valletta	16	6	6	4	21	13	24
Gzira United	16	6	3	7	17	17	21
Naxxar Lions	16	5	5	6	23	26	20

Second Stage Bottom Six

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sliema Wanderers	16	5	7	4	16	17	22
Birkirkara	16	4	7	5	14	14	19
Hibernians	16	4	4	8	16	24	16
Tarxien Rainbows*	16	3	6	7	19	29	15
Zabbar St Patrick*	16	3	6	7	21	22	15
Mosta	16	2	4	10	14	32	10

Tarxien Rainbows beat Zabbar St Patrick 3-2 in play-off after finishing level on head-to-head record

Aggregate Table

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Floriana* (C)	32	21	7	4	51	27	70
Hamrun Spartans*	32	18	8	6	52	21	62
Marsaxlokk*	32	16	8	8	42	36	56
Valletta*	32	14	11	7	41	24	53
Sliema Wanderers	32	12	12	8	37	36	48
Gzira United	32	12	7	13	38	43	43
Hibernians	32	10	9	13	45	49	39
Birkirkara	32	8	11	13	29	36	35
Naxxar Lions** (R)	32	9	8	15	41	51	35
Zabbar St Patrick**	32	6	13	13	41	44	31
Mosta**	32	6	8	18	34	58	26
Tarxien Rainbows** (R)	32	4	10	18	32	58	22

*Advance to championship play-off

**Enter relegation play-offs

Semi-Finals

May 9: Valletta 0-0 Floriana (*AET, Floriana win 3-1 on pens*); Marsaxlokk 2-1 Hamrun Spartans (*AET*)

Third-Place Play-Off

May 15: Valletta 0-2 Hamrun Spartans

Semi-Finals

May 16: Floriana 2-1 Marsaxlokk

Relegation Play-Offs

May 10: Mosta 1-0 Naxxar Lions; Tarxien Rainbows 0-2 Zabbar St Patrick (*AET*)

MOLDOVA

Phase I

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Petrocub Hincesti	21	14	6	1	44	14	48
Zimbru Chisinau	21	13	5	3	52	21	44
Sheriff Tiraspol	21	13	2	6	43	17	41
Milsami Orhei	21	11	4	6	42	25	37
Balti	21	8	5	8	27	29	29
Dacia Buiucani	21	4	3	14	24	39	15
Politehnica UTM*	21	4	1	16	24	61	13
Spartanii Sportul** (R)	21	3	2	16	13	63	11

• *Top six advance to Super Liga Phase II with Phase I points wiped out, bottom two enter Liga 1 (second tier) Phase II*

*Re-won promotion back to Super Liga via Liga 1 (second tier) Phase II

**Failed to regain promotion back to Super Liga

Phase II

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Petrocub Hincesti (C)	10	8	1	1	20	3	40
Sheriff Tiraspol	10	7	2	1	14	5	34
Zimbru Chisinau	10	5	3	2	18	11	32
Milsami Orhei	10	2	3	5	5	13	19
Balti	10	2	2	6	4	15	16
Dacia Buiucani	10	0	1	9	6	20	2

MONTENEGRO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sutjeska (C)	36	22	6	8	61	36	72
Mornar	36	20	9	7	51	29	69
Petrovac	36	13	12	11	44	36	51
Decic	36	14	9	13	43	45	51
Buducnost	36	13	9	14	36	35	48
Mladost Donja Gorica	36	14	4	18	49	54	46
Arsenal Tivat	36	12	10	14	36	46	46
Jezero*	36	10	11	15	38	48	41
Bokelj*	36	8	12	16	38	48	36
Jedinstvo (R)	36	9	8	19	30	49	35

*Enter promotion-relegation play-offs

May 29: Jezero 3-0 Iskra; Bokelj 0-0 Grbalj

Jun 2: Grbalj 0-2 Bokelj (agg 0-2); Iskra 1-5 Jezero (agg 1-8)

NETHERLANDS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSV (C)	34	27	3	4	101	45	84
Feyenoord	34	19	8	7	70	44	65
NEC	34	16	11	7	77	53	59
Twente	34	15	13	6	59	40	58
Ajax*	34	14	14	6	62	41	56
Utrecht*	34	15	8	11	55	42	53
AZ	34	14	10	10	58	51	52
Heerenveen*	34	14	9	11	57	53	51
Groningen*	34	14	6	14	49	45	48
Sparta Rotterdam	34	12	7	15	40	62	43
Fortuna Sittard	34	11	6	17	49	63	39
Go Ahead Eagles	34	8	14	12	54	53	38
Excelsior	34	10	8	16	43	56	38
Telstar	34	9	10	15	49	55	37
PEC Zwolle	34	9	10	15	44	71	37
Volendam** (R)	34	8	8	18	35	55	32
NAC Breda (R)	34	6	11	17	35	58	29
Heracles Almelo (R)	34	5	4	25	35	85	19

*Enter European play-offs

**Enter promotion-relegation play-off

Promotion Play-Offs – First Round

Apr 28: Roda JC 1-1 RKC Waalwijk; Den Bosch 2-3 Almere City

May 1: RKC Waalwijk 1-1 Roda JC (agg 2-2, *AET, RKC Waalwijk win 3-1 on pens*); Almere City 3-0 Den Bosch (agg 6-2)

Promotion Play-Offs – Quarter-Finals

May 5-6: RKC Waalwijk 0-1 Willem II; Almere City 3-1 De Graafschap

May 9: Willem II 1-1 RKC Waalwijk (agg 2-1); De Graafschap 2-2 Almere City (agg 3-5)

Promotion Play-Offs – Semi-Finals

May 5: Almere City 0-1 Willem II

May 9: Willem II 2-0 Almere City (agg 3-0)

Promotion-Relegation Play-Off

May 20: Willem II 1-2 Volendam

May 23: Volendam 1-2 Willem II (agg 3-3, *AET, Willem II win 5-4 on pens*)

European Play-Offs – Semi-Finals

May 21: Ajax 2-0 Groningen; Utrecht 3-2 Heerenveen

European Play-Offs – Final

May 25: Ajax 1-1 Utrecht (*AET, Ajax win 4-3 on pens*)

NORTH MACEDONIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vardar (C)	33	26	5	2	80	21	83
Shkendija	33	23	5	5	67	30	74
Struga	33	19	5	9	68	28	62
Sileks	33	16	5	12	59	35	53
Tikvesh	33	14	6	13	59	47	48
Arsimi	33	13	7	13	49	52	46
Bashkimi	33	11	9	13	40	54	42
Pelister* (R)	33	10	10	13	40	42	40
Brera* (R)	33	10	10	13	46	56	40
Makedonija GP (R)	33	9	7	17	42	57	34
Rabotnicki (R)	33	9	6	18	45	58	33
Shkupi (R)	33	0	1	32	15	130	1

*Enter promotion-relegation play-off

May 31: Brera 0-1 Skopje; Pelister 1-1 Shkendija 77 (*Shkendija 77 win 6-5 on pens*)

NORTHERN IRELAND

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Larne	33	22	7	4	60	22	73
Glentoran	33	21	6	6	63	30	69
Coleraine	33	20	5	8	62	31	65
Linfield	33	18	8	7	56	24	62
Cliftonville	33	13	8	12	49	48	47
Dungannon Swifts	33	15	1	17	40	58	46
Carrick Rangers	33	12	7	14	49	51	43
Bangor	33	10	6	17	38	57	36
Portadown	33	11	3	19	36	57	36
Ballymena United	33	9	7	17	39	50	34
Crusaders	33	7	5	21	38	72	26
Glenavon	33	8	1	24	33	63	25

• *Top six advance to Section A, bottom six enter Section B; points carried over in full*

Section A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Larne (C)	38	25	8	5	73	26	83
Coleraine	38	25	5	8	83	37	80
Glentoran	38	23	8	7	73	38	77
Linfield*	38	19	9	10	61	33	66
Cliftonville*	38	15	8	15	55	59	53
Dungannon Swifts*	38	15	1	22	42	77	46

*Enter European play-offs

Section B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Carrick Rangers*	38	15	8	15	64	58	53
Portadown	38	13	5	20	44	66	44
Ballymena United	38	10	9	19	46	58	39
Bangor	38	10	9	19	41	65	39
Crusaders**	38	10	6	22	48	81	36
Glenavon (R)	38	8	4	26	37	69	28

*Enter European play-offs

**Enter promotion-relegation play-off

European Play-Offs – Quarter-Finals

May 6: Dungannon Swifts 3-1 Carrick Rangers

European Play-Offs – Semi-Finals

May 9: Cliftonville 1-2 Dungannon Swifts

European Play-Offs – Final

May 12: Linfield 3-1 Dungannon Swifts

Promotion-Relegation Play-Off

Apr 28: Annagh United 2-3 Crusaders

May 1: Crusaders 1-2 Annagh United (agg 4-4, *AET, Crusaders win 3-1 on pens*)

POLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lech Poznan (C)	34	16	12	6	62	45	60
Gornik Zabrze	34	16	8	10	50	38	56
Jagiellonia Bialystok	34	15	11	8	56	41	56
Rakow Czestochowa	34	16	7	11	51	40	55
GKS Katowice	34	14	8	12	51	45	50
Legia Warsaw	34	12	13	9	42	37	49
Zaglebie Lubin	34	13	9	12	45	38	48
Wisla Plock	34	12	10	12	34	38	46
Pogon Szczecin	34	13	6	15	47	49	45
Radomiak Radom	34	11	11	12	52	53	44
Korona Kielce	34	11	10	13	40	40	43
Motor Lublin	34	10	13	11	46	53	43
Cracovia	34	9	15	10	39	42	42

Widzew Lodz	34	12	6	16	41	41	42
Piast Gliwice	34	11	8	15	42	46	41
Lechia Gdansk* (R)	34	12	7	15	62	65	38
Arka Gdynia (R)	34	9	9	16	34	61	36
Bruk-Bet Termalica (R)	34	9	7	18	43	65	34

*Deducted 5 points

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Porto (C)	34	28	4	2	66	18	88
Sporting	34	25	7	2	89	24	82
Benfica	34	23	11	0	74	25	80
Braga	34	16	11	7	64	36	59
Famalicao	34	15	11	8	42	29	56
Gil Vicente	34	13	11	10	47	38	50
Moreirense	34	12	7	15	37	49	43
Arouca	34	12	6	16	47	64	42
Vitoria Guimaraes	34	12	6	16	39	51	42
Estoril	34	10	9	15	54	57	39
Alverca	34	10	9	15	35	52	39
Rio Ave	34	8	12	14	35	57	36
Santa Clara	34	9	9	16	32	41	36
Nacional	34	9	7	18	37	45	34
Estrela da Amadora	34	6	12	16	38	56	30
Casa Pia*	34	6	12	16	31	57	30
Tondela (R)	34	6	10	18	27	55	28
AVS (R)	34	3	12	19	27	67	21

**Enter promotion-relegation play-off
May 20: Torreense 0-0 Casa Pia
May 28: Casa Pia 2-0 Torreense (agg 2-0)

ROMANIA

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Universitatea Craiova	30	17	9	4	53	27	60
Rapid Bucharest	30	16	8	6	47	30	56
Universitatea Cluj	30	16	6	8	48	27	54
CFR Cluj	30	15	8	7	49	40	53
Dinamo Bucharest	30	14	10	6	42	28	52
Arges Pitesti	30	15	5	10	37	28	50
FCSB	30	13	7	10	48	40	46
UTA Arad	30	11	10	9	39	44	43
Botosani	30	11	9	10	37	29	42
Otelul Galati	30	11	8	11	39	32	41
Farul Constanta	30	10	7	13	39	37	37
Petrolul Ploiesti	30	7	11	12	24	31	32
Csikszereda Miercurea Ciuc	30	8	8	14	30	58	32
Unirea Slobozia	30	7	4	19	27	46	25
Hermannstadt	30	5	8	17	29	50	23
Metalogobus Bucharest	30	2	6	22	25	66	12

• *Top six advance to play-off round, bottom ten enter play-out round; points halved and rounded up*

Play-Off Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Universitatea Craiova (C)	10	6	2	2	12	6	50
Universitatea Cluj	10	6	1	3	13	11	46
CFR Cluj	10	4	4	2	8	7	43
Dinamo Bucharest*	10	3	4	3	13	12	39
Rapid Bucharest	10	1	3	6	8	14	34
Arges Pitesti	10	1	4	5	6	10	32

*Enter European play-offs

Play-Out Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
UTA Arad	9	5	2	2	14	7	39
FCSB*	9	4	2	3	13	9	37
Otelul Galati	9	4	2	3	17	15	35
Botosani*	9	3	3	3	13	17	33
Csikszereda Miercurea Ciuc	9	5	2	2	11	8	33
Petrolul Ploiesti	9	2	3	4	9	15	25
Farul Constanta**	9	1	3	5	8	11	25
Hermannstadt** (R)	9	3	4	2	13	10	25
Unirea Slobozia (R)	9	2	3	4	11	13	22
Metalogobus Bucharest (R)	9	2	4	3	10	14	16

*Enter European play-offs
**Enter promotion-relegation play-offs

European Play-Offs – Semi-Finals
May 24: FCSB 4-3 Botosani (*AET*)

European Play-Offs – Final
May 29: Dinamo Bucharest 1-2 FCSB (*AET*)

Promotion-Relegation Play-Offs
May 23-24: Chindia Targoviste 3-3 Farul Constanta; Hermannstadt 3-2 Voluntari
May 31-Jun 1: Farul 1-1 Chindia Targoviste (agg 4-4, *AET, Farul Constanta win 4-2 on pens*); Voluntari 3-0 Hermannstadt (agg 5-3)

RUSSIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zenit (C)	30	20	8	2	53	19	68
Krasnodar	30	20	6	4	60	23	66
Lokomotiv Moscow	30	14	11	5	54	39	53
Spartak Moscow	30	15	7	8	47	39	52
CSKA Moscow	30	15	6	9	44	33	51
Baltika Kaliningrad	30	11	13	6	38	21	46
Dynamo Moscow	30	12	9	9	51	40	45
Rubin Kazan	30	11	10	9	29	30	43
Akhmat Grozny	30	9	10	11	35	39	37
Rostov	30	8	9	13	25	32	33
Krylia Sovetov Samara	30	8	8	14	35	50	32
Orenburg	30	7	8	15	29	44	29
Akron Tolyatti*	30	6	9	15	35	53	27
Dynamo Makhachkala*	30	5	11	14	19	37	26
Pari Nizhny Novgorod (R)	30	6	5	19	26	50	23
Sochi (R)	30	6	4	20	29	60	22

*Enter promotion-relegation play-offs
May 20: Rotor Volgograd 0-2 Akron Tolyatti; Ural Yekaterinburg 0-1 Dynamo Makhachkala
May 23: Akron Tolyatti 0-1 Rotor Volgograd (agg 2-1); Dynamo Makhachkala 2-0 Ural Yekaterinburg (agg 3-0)

SAN MARINO

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tre Fiori (C)	30	22	7	1	63	13	73
Virtus	30	22	6	2	76	20	72
Tre Penne	30	21	7	2	71	18	70
La Fiorita*	30	17	11	2	64	25	57
Folgore	30	16	9	5	67	33	57
Domagnano	30	14	7	9	59	36	49
Fiorentino	30	14	4	12	37	42	46
Cosmos	30	11	9	10	30	23	42
Juvenes/Dogana	30	9	10	11	36	38	37
Libertas	30	9	8	13	32	63	35
Pennarossa	30	8	8	14	29	53	32
San Giovanni	30	7	10	13	24	43	31
Faetano	30	6	4	20	22	55	22
San Marino Academy U22	30	3	7	20	23	60	16
Cailungo	30	2	5	23	23	71	11
Murata**	30	1	4	25	20	83	-2

• *Teams 2nd to 11th enter European play-offs*
*Deducted 5 points **Deducted 9 points

First Round
Apr 29: Juvenes/Dogana 1-1 Libertas (*Juvenes/Dogana advance as the higher-ranked team in league*); Cosmos 3-0 Pennarossa

Quarter-Finals
May 2-3: Domagnano 0-1 Folgore; La Fiorita 1-0 Fiorentino; Virtus 0-0 Juvenes/Dogana; Tre Penne 0-0 Cosmos
May 5-6: Folgore 1-3 Domagnano (agg 2-3); Fiorentino 3-2 La Fiorita (agg 3-3, *La Fiorita advance as the higher-ranked team in league*); Juvenes/Dogana 0-2 Virtus (agg 0-2); Cosmos 0-0 Tre Penne (agg 0-0, *Tre Penne advance as the higher-ranked team in league*)

Semi-Finals
May 9:
Virtus 2-1 Domagnano; La Fiorita 1-1 Tre Penne
May 12: Tre Penne 0-1 La Fiorita (agg 1-2); Domagnano 2-1 Virtus (agg 3-3, *Virtus advance as the higher-ranked team in league*)

Fourth Place Play-Off
May 16: Tre Penne 3-1 Domagnano

Final
May 16: Virtus 2-1 La Fiorita

SCOTLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic (C)	38	26	4	8	73	41	82
Hearts	38	24	8	6	67	34	80
Rangers	38	20	12	6	76	43	72
Motherwell	38	16	13	9	59	36	61
Hibernian	38	15	12	11	58	44	57
Falkirk	38	14	7	17	50	62	49
Dundee United	38	10	15	13	49	60	45
Dundee	38	11	9	18	42	61	42
Aberdeen	38	11	7	20	40	55	40
Kilmarnock	38	10	10	18	50	68	40
St Mirren*	38	8	10	20	30	55	34
Livingston (R)	38	2	15	21	40	75	21

• *Teams play each other three times (33 games) before league is split into a top and bottom half*
*Enter promotion-relegation play-off

Promotion Play-Offs – Quarter-Finals
May 5: Dunfermline Athletic 1-0 Arbroath
May 8: Arbroath 0-0 Dunfermline (agg 0-1)

Promotion Play-Offs – Semi-Finals
May 12: Dunfermline Athletic 1-1 Partick Thistle
May 15: Partick Thistle 2-1 Dunfermline (agg 3-2)

Promotion-Relegation Play-Off
May 21: Partick Thistle 1-1 St Mirren
May 25: St Mirren 1-0 Partick Thistle (agg 2-1)

SERBIA

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Red Star	30	24	3	3	87	23	75
Vojvodina	30	19	5	6	55	29	62
Partizan	30	19	4	7	62	39	61
Zeleznicar	30	15	6	9	42	30	51
Novi Pazar	30	13	8	9	38	37	47
OFK Belgrade	30	10	10	10	39	39	40
Cukaricki	30	10	10	10	42	43	40
Radnik	30	10	9	11	37	35	39
IMT	30	10	7	13	35	49	37
Radnicki 1923	30	8	12	10	32	37	36
Javor-Matis	30	8	10	12	29	39	34
TSC	30	8	10	12	26	35	34
Radnicki Nis	30	9	6	15	36	42	33
Mladost	30	7	11	12	23	46	32
Spartak Subotica	30	4	9	17	34	55	21
Napredak	30	2	8	20	26	65	14

• *Top eight advance to championship round, bottom eight enter relegation round; points carried over in full*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Red Star (C)	37	27	5	5	100	31	86
Vojvodina	37	23	7	7	66	35	76
Partizan	37	22	7	8	72	45	73
Zeleznicar	37	16	11	10	50	37	59
Novi Pazar	37	14	10	13	46	54	52
OFK Belgrade	37	12	13	12	49	47	49
Radnik	37	11	13	13	44	48	46
Cukaricki	37	10	15	12	47	50	45

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
IMT	37	13	11	13	41	51	50
Radnicki Nis	37	14	7	16	46	49	49
Mladost	37	11	13	13	33	52	46
Radnicki 1923	37	9	18	10	41	42	45
TSC (R)	37	11	12	14	45	45	45
Javor-Matis (R)	37	10	12	15	41	54	42
Spartak Subotica (R)	37	4	9	24	37	72	21
Napredak (R)	37	3	9	25	30	76	18

SLOVAKIA

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovan Bratislava	22	14	4	4	47	30	46
DAC Dunajska Streda	22	12	7	3	39	20	43
Zilina	22	11	7	4	45	27	40
Spartak Trnava	22	11	4	7	35	28	37
Podbrezova	22	11	3	8	46	29	36
Zemplin Michalovce	22	8	5	9	32	36	29
Ruzomberok	22	6	7	9	24	34	25
Trencin	22	7	3	12	18	37	24
Kosice	22	7	3	12	35	42	24
Komarno	22	5	7	10	24	34	22
Tatran Presov	22	4	9	9	22	35	21
Skalica	22	3	7	12	20	35	16

• *Top six advance to championship round, bottom six enter relegation round; points carried over in full*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovan Bratislava (C)	32	21	5	6	62	37	68
DAC Dunajska Streda	32	17	7	8	55	34	58
Spartak Trnava	32	17	5	10	51	37	56
Zilina	32	15	7	10	59	41	52
Zemplin Michalovce	32	13	5	14	44	52	44
Podbrezova	32	13	3	16	55	51	42

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kosice	32	13	4	15	51	55	43
Trencin	32	13	3	16	34	51	42
Skalica	32	9	8	15	34	45	35
Ruzomberok	32	8	11	13	34	50	35
Komarno*	32	8	8	16	34	46	32
Tatran Presov (R)	32	6	12	14	29	43	30

*Enter promotion-relegation play-off
May 19: Zvolen 1-0 Komarno
May 23: Komarno 3-0 Zvolen (agg 3-1)

SLOVENIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celje (C)	34	23	5	6	85	32	74
Koper	34	20	7	7	71	43	67
Bravo	34	19	5	10	62	51	62
Olimpija Ljubljana	34	16	7	11	50	40	55
Maribor	34	15	8	11	57	43	53
Radomlje	34	13	6	15	50	63	45
Aluminij	34	10	6	18	42	61	36
Mura	34	8	7	19	35	55	31
Primorje* (R)	34	6	4	24	31	74	22
Domale** (R)	18	3	3	12	17	38	12

*Enter promotion-relegation play-off
**Withdrew
May 27: Primorje 0-0 Nafta 1903
May 31: Nafta 1903 1-0 Primorje (agg 1-0)

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona (C)	38	31	1	6	95	36	94
Real Madrid	38	27	5	6	77	35	86
Villarreal	38	22	6	10	72	46	72
Atletico Madrid	38	21	6	11	62	44	69
Real Betis	38	15	15	8	59	48	60
Celta Vigo	38	14	12	12	53	48	54
Getafe	38	15	6	17	32	38	51
Rayo Vallecano	38	12	14	12	41	44	50
Valencia	38	13	10	15	46	55	49
Real Sociedad	38	11	13	14	59	61	46
Espanyol	38	12	10	16	43	55	46
Athletic Club	38	13	6	19	43	58	45
Sevilla	38	12	7	19	46	60	43
Alaves	38	11	10	17	44	56	43
Elche	38	10	13	15	49	57	43
Levante	38	11	9	18	47	61	42
Osasuna	38	11	9	18	44	50	42
Mallorca (R)	38	11	9	18	47	57	42
Girona (R)	38	9	14	15	39	55	41
Real Oviedo (R)	38	6	11	21	26	60	29

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Thun (C)	38	24	3	11	80	52	75
St Gallen	38	20	10	8	72	47	70
Lugano	38	19	10	9	59	42	67
Sion	38	16	15	7	63	40	63
Basel	38	16	8	14	55	58	56
Young Boys	38	15	10	13	80	69	55
Luzern	38	14	11	13	76	66	53
Servette	38	13	14	11	71	63	53
Lausanne-Sport	38	11	9	18	53	67	42
Zurich	38	11	5	22	49	72	38
Grasshopper*	38	8	9	21	48	74	33
Winterthur (R)	38	5	8	25	44	100	23

• *Teams play each other three times (33 games) before league is split into a top and bottom half*
*Enter promotion-relegation play-off
May 18: Aarau 0-0 Grasshopper
May 21: Grasshopper 2-1 Aarau (*AET*)

TURKEY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Galatasaray (C)	34	24	5	5	77	30	77
Fenerbahce	34	21	11	2	77	37	74
Trabzonspor	34	20	9	5	61	39	69
Besiktas	34	17	9	8	59	40	60
Istanbul Basaksehir	34	16	9	9	58	35	57
Goztepe	34	14	13	7	42	32	55
Samsunspor	34	13	12	9	46	45	51
Rizespor	34	10	11	13	46	52	41
Konyaspor	34	10	10	14	43	50	40
Kocaelispor	34	9	10	15	26	38	37
Alanyaspor	34	7	16	11	41	41	37
Gaziantep	34	9	10	15	43	58	37
Kasimpasa	34	8	11	15	33	49	35
Genclerbirligi	34	9	7	18	36	47	34
Eyupspor	34	8	9	17	33	48	33
Antalyaspor (R)	34	8	8	18	33	55	32
Kayserispor (R)	34	6	12	16	27	62	30
Fatih Karagumruk (R)	34	8	6	20	31	54	30

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shakhtar Donetsk (C)	30	22	6	2	71	21	72
LNZ Cherkasy	30	18	6	6	39	17	60
Polissya Zhytomyr	30	18	5	7	51	21	59
Dynamo Kyiv	30	17	6	7	66	36	57
Metalist 1925 Kharkiv	30	13	12	5	36	19	51
Kolos Kovalivka	30	13	10	7	30	25	49
Kryvbas Kryvyi Rih	30	13	9	8	53	46	48
Zorya Luhansk	30	12	10	8	42	36	46
Karpaty Lviv	30	10	11	9	40	31	41
Epitsentr Kamianets-Podilskyi	30	8	8	14	36	45	32
Veres Rivne	30	7	10	13	26	40	31
Obolon Kyiv	30	7	10	13	28	49	31
Kudrivka*	30	7	7	16	32	48	28
Rukh Lviv (R)	30	6	3	21	20	51	21
Oleksandriya* (R)	30	3	8	19	24	58	17
Poltava (R)	30	2	7	21	23	74	13

*Enter promotion-relegation play-offs
Jun 5: Oleksandriya 1-1 Livyi Bereh Kyiv; Kudrivka 0-0 Ahrobiznes Volochysk
Jun 9: Livyi Bereh Kyiv 1-0 Oleksandriya (agg 2-1); Ahrobiznes Volochysk 2-2 Kudrivka (agg 2-2, *Kudrivka win 3-2 on pens*)

WALES

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
The New Saints	22	17	2	3	59	19	53
Connah's Quay Nomads	22	14	5	3	48	25	47
Penybont	22	11	5	6	36	31	38
Caernarfon Town	22	9	7	6	44	32	34
Barry Town United	22	7	9	6	33	25	30
Colwyn Bay	22	8	6	8	29	25	30
Cardiff MU	22	6	10	6	33	36	28
Briton Ferry Llansawel	22	6	7	9	32	40	25
Haverfordwest County	22	6	6	10	30	39	24
Bala Town	22	6	5	11	19	30	23
Flint Town United	22	5	6	11	34	48	21
Llanelli Town	22	2	2	18	12	59	8

• *Top six advance to championship round, bottom six enter relegation round; points carried over in full*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
The New Saints (C)	32	26	2	4	81	25	80
Connah's Quay Nomads	32	16	10	6	61	38	58
Barry Town United*	32	12	10	10	43	33	46
Caernarfon Town	32	12	9	11	56	47	45
Colwyn Bay*	32	12	9	11	41	37	45
Penybont*	32	11	8	13	39	49	41

**Enter European play-offs*

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Haverfordwest County*	32	14	6	12	48	43	48
Briton Ferry Llansawel	32	12	9	11	46	47	45
Cardiff MU	32	8	14	10	43	51	38
Flint Town United	32	8	11	13	48	59	35
Bala Town (R)	32	8	8	16	33	45	32
Llanelli Town (R)	32	3	4	25	17	82	13

**Enter European play-offs*

Semi-Finals

Apr 25-26:
Colwyn Bay 0-0 Penybont (*Penybont win 5-3 on pens*); Barry Town United 1-1 Haverfordwest County (*Haverfordwest County win 3-1 on pens*)

Final

May 2: Penybont 2-0 Haverfordwest County

SOUTH AMERICA

2026 COPA LIBERTADORES

Group A

May 26 – Rio de Janeiro
Flamengo (Bra) 3 (Bruno Henrique 80, 84, Paqueta 90+1 pen)
Cusco (Per) 0

May 26 – La Plata
Estudiantes (Arg) 1 (Amondarain 90+1)
Independiente Medellin (Col) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Flamengo (Q)	6	5	1	0	14	2	16
Estudiantes (Q)	6	2	3	1	6	5	9
Ind Medellin*	6	2	1	3	6	11	7
Cusco	6	0	1	5	4	12	1

Group B

May 26 – Montevideo
Nacional (Uru) 1 (Gomez 7)
Coquimbo Unido (Chi) 0

May 26 – Lima
Universitario (Per) 0
Tolima (Col) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Coquimbo Unido (Q)	6	3	1	2	8	6	10
Tolima (Q)	6	2	2	2	7	6	8
Nacional*	6	2	2	2	7	9	8
Universitario	6	1	3	2	5	6	6

Group C

May 27 – Rio de Janeiro
Fluminense (Bra) 3 (Savarino 10 pen, Hercules 28, Canobbio 66)
Deportivo La Guaira (Ven) 1 (Londono 12)

May 27 – Santa Cruz de la Sierra
Bolivar (Bol) 1 (Cauteruccio 55)
Independiente Rivadavia (Arg) 3 (Bucca 45+7, Villa 90+2, Crego 90+5)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ind Rivadavia (Q)	6	5	1	0	15	6	16
Fluminense (Q)	6	2	2	2	7	7	8
Bolivar*	6	1	2	3	6	8	5
Dep La Guaira	6	0	3	3	6	13	3

Group D

May 28 – Buenos Aires
Boca Juniors (Arg) 0
Universidad Catolica (Chi) 1 (Montes 34)

May 28 – Belo Horizonte
Cruzeiro (Bra) 4 (Matheus Pereira 5, 71, Christian 52, Sinisterra 55)
Barcelona SC (Ecu) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
U. Catolica (Q)	6	4	1	1	8	4	13
Cruzeiro (Q)	6	3	2	1	8	3	11
Boca Juniors*	6	2	1	3	6	5	7
Barcelona SC	6	1	0	5	2	12	3

Group E

May 27 – Montevideo
Penarol (Uru) 0
Santa Fe (Col) 1 (Zapata 13)

May 27 – Sao Paulo
Corinthians (Bra) 0
Platense (Arg) 2 (Zapiola 21 pen, 57)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Corinthians (Q)	6	3	2	1	8	4	11
Platense (Q)	6	3	1	2	8	7	10
Santa Fe*	6	2	2	2	6	7	8
Penarol	6	0	3	3	4	8	3

Group F

May 28 – Sao Paulo
Palmeiras (Bra) 4 (Arias 6, 45, Allan 40, Andreas Pereira 51)
Junior (Col) 1 (Muriel 36)

May 28 – Asuncion
Cerro Porteno (Par) 2 (Vegetti 51, C. Dominguez 67 pen)
Sporting Cristal (Per) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cerro Porteno (Q)	6	4	1	1	6	2	13
Palmeiras (Q)	6	3	2	1	10	5	11
Sporting Cristal*	6	2	0	4	6	9	6
Junior	6	1	1	4	5	11	4

Group G

May 26 – Quito
LDU Quito (Ecu) 3 (Y. Quinonez 7, Deyverson 77, 89)
Always Ready (Bol) 2 (Triverio 18, Nava 40)

May 26 – Lanus
Lanus (Arg) 1 (Medina 22)
Mirassol (Bra) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LDU Quito (Q)	6	4	0	2	8	5	12
Mirassol (Q)	6	4	0	2	7	4	12
Lanus*	6	3	0	3	3	7	9
Always Ready	6	1	0	5	7	9	3

Group H

May 27 – Quito
Ind del Valle (Ecu) 1 (Sornoza 64 pen)
Rosario Central (Arg) 0

May 27 – Asuncion
Libertad (Par) 0
Universidad Central (Ven) 1 (Cuesta 62)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ind del Valle (Q)	6	4	1	1	11	6	13
Rosario Central (Q)	6	4	1	1	9	1	13
Universidad Central*	6	3	0	3	7	11	9
Libertad	6	0	0	6	4	13	0

**Third-placed teams enter Sudamericana play-offs*

2026 COPA SUDAMERICANA

Group A

May 28: Tigre (Arg) 2-0 Alianza Atletico (Per); America de Cali (Col) 0-0 Macara (Ecu)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Macara (Q)	6	2	4	0	6	3	10
Tigre*	6	2	3	1	8	5	9
America de Cali	6	2	3	1	6	5	9
Alianza Atletico	6	0	2	4	2	9	2

Group B

May 27: Atl Mineiro (Bra) 1-0 Academia Puerto Cabello (Ven); Cienciano (Per) 1-1 Juventud (Uru)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atletico Mineiro (Q)	6	3	1	2	8	6	10
Cienciano*	6	2	2	2	5	7	8
Juventud	6	1	4	1	10	7	7
Academia PC	6	2	1	3	6	9	7

Group C

May 26: Millonarios (Col) 1-2 O'Higgins (Chi); Sao Paulo (Bra) 2-0 Boston River (Uru)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sao Paulo (Q)	6	3	3	0	6	1	12
O'Higgins*	6	3	1	2	8	6	10
Millonarios	6	2	2	2	7	7	8
Boston River	6	1	0	5	5	12	3

Group D

May 26: San Lorenzo (Arg) 0-1 Recoleta (Par); Santos (Bra) 3-0 Deportivo Cuenca (Ecu)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Recoleta (Q)	6	1	5	0	6	5	8
Santos*	6	1	4	1	8	6	7
San Lorenzo	6	1	4	1	6	5	7
Deportivo Cuenca	6	1	3	2	3	7	6

Group E

May 27: Caracas (Ven) 1-3 Botafogo (Bra); Racing (Arg) 2-0 Independiente Petrolero (Bol)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Botafogo (Q)	6	5	1	0	15	5	16
Caracas*	6	2	3	1	9	9	9
Racing	6	2	2	2	11	9	8
Ind Petrolero	6	0	0	6	3	15	0

Group F

May 26: Palestino (Chi) 1-1 Deportivo Riestra (Arg); Gremio (Bra) 2-2 Montevideo City Torque (Uru)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Montevideo City Torque (Q)	6	4	1	1	11	5	13
Gremio*	6	3	2	1	8	3	11
Deportivo Riestra	6	1	2	3	4	10	5
Palestino	6	0	3	3	1	6	3

Group G

May 27: Olimpia (Par) 3-1 Audax Italiano (Chi); Vasco da Gama (Bra) 3-0 Barracas Central (Arg)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olimpia (Q)	6	4	1	1	10	6	13
Vasco da Gama*	6	3	1	2	10	6	10
Audax Italiano	6	2	1	3	7	9	7
Barracas Central	6	0	3	3	2	8	3

Group H

May 27: River Plate (Arg) 3-0 Blooming (Bol); Red Bull Bragantino (Bra) 2-0 Carabobo (Ven)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
River Plate (Q)	6	4	2	0	9	3	14
RB Bragantino*	6	3	1	2	12	5	10
Carabobo	6	3	0	3	6	5	9
Blooming	6	0	1	5	3	17	1

**All runners-up advance to Sudamericana play-offs*

ARGENTINA

Apertura Zone A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Estudiantes LP	16	9	4	3	19	7	31
Boca Juniors	16	8	6	2	22	9	30
Velez Sarsfield	16	7	7	2	18	12	28
Talleres	16	7	5	4	17	13	26
Independiente	16	6	6	4	24	20	24
Lanus	16	6	6	4	18	15	24
San Lorenzo	16	5	7	4	14	14	22
Union	16	5	6	5	24	20	21
Instituto	16	6	3	7	17	17	21
Defensa y Justicia	16	4	7	5	18	21	19
Gimnasia y Esgrima M	16	5	4	7	14	22	19
Platense	16	3	7	6	10	15	16
Central Cordoba	16	4	4	8	11	21	16
Newell's Old Boys	16	3	6	7	15	27	15
Deportivo Riestra	16	1	8	7	5	12	11

• *Top eight advance to next stage*

Apertura Zone B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ind Rivadavia	16	10	4	2	29	15	34
River Plate	16	9	2	5	22	12	29
Argentinos Juniors	16	8	5	3	17	13	29
Rosario Central	16	8	4	4	20	16	28
Belgrano (C)	16	7	5	4	17	13	26
Gimnasia y Esgrima LP	16	8	2	6	19	19	26
Huracan	16	5	7	4	17	13	22
Racing	16	5	6	5	17	15	21
Barracas Central	16	5	6	5	15	15	21
Tigre	16	4	8	4	18	15	20
Sarmiento	16	6	1	9	13	20	19
Banfield	16	5	3	8	17	19	18
Atletico Tucuman	16	3	5	8	15	20	14
Aldosivi	16	0	8	8	6	19	8
Estudiantes RC	16	1	2	13	5	24	5

• *Top eight advance to next stage*

Last 16

May 9-10:
Talleres 0-1 Belgrano; Boca Juniors 2-3 Huracan (*AET*); Independiente Rivadavia 1-2 Union; Argentinos Juniors 2-0 Lanus; Rosario Central 3-1 Independiente; Estudiantes LP 0-1 Racing; River Plate 2-2 San Lorenzo (*AET, River Plate win 4-3 on pens*); Velez Sarsfield 0-1 Gimnasia y Esgrima LP

Quarter-Finals

May 12-13:
Belgrano 2-0 Union; Argentinos Juniors 1-0 Huracan (*AET*); Rosario Central 2-1 Racing (*AET*); River Plate 2-0 Gimnasia y Esgrima LP

Semi-Finals

May 16-17:
River Plate 1-0 Rosario Central; Argentinos Juniors 1-1 Belgrano (*AET, Belgrano win 4-3 on pens*)

Final

May 24 – Cordoba
River Plate 2 (Colidio 18, Galvan 59)
Belgrano 3 (Morales 26, Fernandez 85 pen, 88)

COLOMBIA

Apertura Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atletico Nacional	19	13	1	5	35	15	40
Junior (C)	19	11	2	6	31	24	35
Deportivo Pasto	19	10	4	5	29	25	34
America de Cali	19	10	3	6	25	15	33
Once Caldas	19	8	9	2	31	22	33
Tolima	19	8	7	4	27	17	31
Santa Fe	19	7	8	4	29	22	29
Internacional de Bogota	19	7	7	5	26	26	28
Deportivo Cali	19	7	6	6	20	16	27
Millonarios	19	7	5	7	31	23	26
Ind Medellin	19	7	5	7	26	24	26
Aguilas Doradas	19	7	5	7	20	25	26
Atletico Bucaramanga	19	5	8	6	26	20	23
Llaneros	19	4	10	5	17	20	22
Fortaleza	19	5	7	7	22	27	22
Jaguares	19	5	3	11	20	33	18
Alianza	19	3	8	8	13	27	17
Boyaca Chico	19	5	2	12	15	32	17
Cucuta Deportivo	19	3	7	9	22	35	16
Deportivo Pereira	19	1	7	11	15	32	10

• *Top eight advance to next stage*

Quarter-Finals

May 9-10: Internacional de Bogota 1-2 Atletico Nacional; Tolima 1-0 Deportivo Pasto; America de Cali 1-1 Santa Fe; Once Caldas 0-1 Junior
May 12-13: Atletico Nacional 7-1 Internacional de Bogota (agg 9-2); Santa Fe 4-0 America de Cali (agg 5-1); Deportivo Pasto 0-2 Tolima (agg 0-3); Junior 2-2 Once Caldas (agg 3-2)

Semi-Finals

May 16:
Tolima 0-1 Atletico Nacional; Santa Fe 1-1 Junior
May 23:
Atletico Nacional 3-1 Tolima (agg 4-1); Junior 0-0 Santa Fe (agg 1-1, *Junior win 5-4 on pens*)

Final

Jun 2 – Barranquilla
Junior 3 (Castrillon 7, Muriel 36, 53 pen)
Atletico Nacional 0

Jun 8 – Medellin
Atletico Nacional 1 (Cardona 56)
Junior 0
Junior win 3-1 on aggregate

PARAGUAY

Apertura

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olimpia (C)	22	15	4	3	37	17	49
Nacional	22	10	9	3	31	22	39
Cerro Porteno	22	11	5	6	30	22	38
Sportivo Ameliano	22	8	9	5	27	21	33
Sportivo Trinidense	22	8	8	6	30	24	32
Libertad	22	9	4	9	34	26	31
Guarani	22	7	8	7	27	23	29
Recoleta	22	8	4	10	35	32	28
Rubio Nu	22	6	5	11	15	26	23
2 de Mayo	22	5	7	10	18	35	22
Sportivo Luqueno	22	5	5	12	24	33	20
San Lorenzo	22	3	6	13	14	41	15

PERU

Apertura

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Alianza Lima*	17	12	4	1	30	8	40
Los Chankas	17	10	4	3	25	21	34
Cienciano	17	10	3	4	34	22	33
Universitario	17	8	5	4	24	15	29
Melgar	17	8	4	5	29	20	28
Cusco	17	8	3	6	21	24	27
Deportivo Garcilaso	17	7	5	5	21	18	26
Alianza Atletico	17	5	6	6	20	18	21
Comerciantes Unidos	17	5	6	6	18	20	21
ADT	17	5	5	7	22	21	20
Sport Boys	17	5	5	7	15	19	20
Sporting Cristal	17	5	4	8	28	30	19
Deportivo Moquegua	17	5	3	9	17	24	18
Cajamarca	17	4	5	8	23	28	17
Atletico Grau	17	4	4	9	12	18	16
Sport Huancayo	17	4	4	9	21	31	16
Juan Pablo II College	17	4	4	9	22	40	16
UTC**	17	4	6	7	21	26	13

*Advance to championship play-off
**Deducted 5 points

URUGUAY

Apertura

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Racing*	15	9	4	2	23	14	31
Deportivo Maldonado	15	9	2	4	24	16	29
Albion	15	8	4	3	26	16	28
Penarol	15	8	3	4	23	16	27
Central Espanol	15	7	3	5	23	22	24
Montevideo City Torque	15	6	5	4	22	16	23
Nacional	15	7	1	7	26	21	22
Defensor Sporting	15	5	6	4	13	11	21
Liverpool	15	5	5	5	20	18	20
Montevideo Wanderers	15	6	2	7	16	21	20
Danubio	15	4	6	5	17	21	18
Cerro Largo	15	5	2	8	16	19	17
Boston River	15	5	2	8	14	20	17
Juventud	15	4	3	8	17	22	15
Progreso	15	2	4	9	12	23	10
Cerro	15	2	4	9	8	24	10

*Advance to championship play-off

VENEZUELA

Apertura Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Deportivo La Guaira	13	7	6	0	15	6	27
Metropolitanos	13	7	4	2	17	10	25
Deportivo Tachira	13	7	3	3	17	12	24
Universidad Central	13	7	2	4	24	20	23
Portuguesa	13	5	5	3	20	12	20
Estudiantes de Merida	13	6	2	5	21	18	20
Carabobo	13	4	7	2	23	14	19
Academia PC	13	4	5	4	16	14	17
Zamora	13	4	5	4	14	14	17
Caracas	13	3	6	4	15	17	15
Rayo Zuliano	13	4	2	7	13	23	14
Monagas	13	3	2	8	14	22	11
Anzoategui	13	2	3	8	15	25	9
Trujillanos	13	0	4	9	9	26	4

• Top eight advance to next stage

Apertura Final Stage Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Academia PC*	6	3	1	2	8	7	10
Portuguesa	6	2	2	2	7	8	8
Deportivo La Guaira	6	1	4	1	5	5	7
Universidad Central	6	1	3	2	8	8	6

*Advance to final

Apertura Final Stage Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Carabobo* (C)	6	3	2	1	10	5	11
Deportivo Tachira	6	3	2	1	8	5	11
Metropolitanos	6	2	2	2	5	7	8
Estudiantes de Merida	6	1	0	5	2	8	3

*Advance to final

Final

Jun 7 – Barranquilla
Carabobo 2 (Ramirez 26 pen, Martinez 58)
Academia Puerto Cabello 1 (Pernia 90+4)

CONCACAF

2026 CONCACAF CHAMPIONS CUP

Final

May 30 – Toluca
Toluca (Mex) 1 (J. Diaz 104)
Tigres UANL (Mex) 1 (Joaquim 114)
After Extra-Time; Toluca win 6-5 on pens

2026 CANADIAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Preliminary Round

May 5-10:
Toronto FC 1-3 Atletico Ottawa; CF Montreal 5-0 Caglary Blizzard; Supra 3-1 Woodbridge Strikers; Forge 4-0 HFX Wanderers; Pacific 1-3 Cavalry; Inter Toronto 0-1 CS Saint-Laurent; Vancouver FC 2-0 Langley United

BARBADOS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Weymouth Wales (C)	18	13	4	1	35	10	43
KickStart Rush	18	10	6	2	54	15	36
Brittons Hill United	18	11	2	5	42	24	35
Ellerton	18	10	4	4	33	17	34
Paradise	18	10	3	5	55	19	33
Blackbirds	18	6	1	11	21	30	19
Pride of Gall Hill	18	5	4	9	16	29	19
Bagatelle	18	5	3	10	20	30	18
St Andrew Lions (R)	18	2	4	12	18	66	10
Wotton (R)	18	2	1	15	19	73	7

CAYMAN ISLANDS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Elite (C)	22	17	4	1	70	12	55
Academy	22	18	0	4	82	21	54
Scholars International	22	15	2	5	62	20	47
Bodden Town	22	13	4	5	55	29	43
345 FC	22	10	5	7	47	32	35
Cayman Athletics	22	11	1	10	38	37	34
Sunset	22	9	3	10	40	45	30
Savannah Tigers	22	8	4	10	39	43	28
East End United	22	6	3	13	42	71	21
Future*	22	5	2	15	26	72	17
Latinos (R)	22	3	1	18	25	75	10
Cayman Brac (R)	22	2	1	19	13	82	7

*Enter promotion-relegation play-off

CURACAO

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Scherpenheuvel*	18	13	3	2	39	14	42
Jong Holland*	18	13	1	4	56	21	40
Victory Boys*	18	10	3	5	35	18	33
Jong Colombia*	18	10	2	6	48	26	32
Inter Willemstad*	18	9	2	7	44	33	29
Centro Dominguito*	18	8	2	8	28	35	26
UNDEBA	18	6	1	11	19	36	19
CSD Barber	18	6	0	12	25	47	18
Atletiko Salina	18	4	4	10	14	33	16
Sport Unie Brion Trappers (R)	18	1	2	15	16	61	5

*Advance to next stage

Kaya 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Centro Dominguito*	5	3	1	1	10	5	10
Scherpenheuvel*	5	3	1	1	9	6	10
Jong Holland*	5	2	1	2	11	10	7
Inter Willemstad*	5	2	1	2	8	8	7
Victory Boys	5	1	2	2	8	9	5
Jong Colombia	5	1	0	4	5	13	3

*Advance to next stage

Kaya 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Scherpenheuvel*	3	2	1	0	5	3	7
Inter Willemstad* (C)	3	2	0	1	6	3	6
Jong Holland	3	1	1	1	5	4	4
Centro Dominguito	3	0	0	3	2	8	0

*Advance to final

Final

Jun 1: Scherpenheuvel 0-1 Inter Willemstad

GUADELOUPE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Le Siroco (C)	26	16	7	3	57	25	81
Moulien	26	14	8	4	51	20	76
Baie-Mahault	26	15	6	5	41	19	76
La Gauloise de Basse-Terre	26	14	7	5	43	24	75
Gosier	26	14	5	7	57	36	73
L'Etoile Morne-a-l'Eau	26	11	10	5	40	32	69
Dynamo	26	11	5	10	36	36	64
Jeunesse Evolution	26	10	6	10	34	38	62
Le Moule	26	9	6	11	38	47	59
Arsenal Club de Petit-Bourg	25	9	5	11	33	33	56
Gourbeyrienne	26	5	6	15	24	46	47
Amical Marquisat (R)	25	5	5	15	27	45	45
Stade Lamentinois (R)	26	3	5	18	17	54	40
CERFA (R)	26	1	7	18	34	77	36

Win = 4 points, Draw = 2 points, Loss = 1 point

MARTINIQUE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
RC Saint-Joseph (C)	26	21	5	0	64	10	94
Club Franciscain	26	20	3	3	54	16	89
Golden Lion	26	15	4	7	51	27	75
Club Colonial	26	15	2	9	44	30	73
Samaritaine	26	11	7	8	49	27	66
Club Peleen	26	11	4	11	40	43	63
Sainte-Anne	26	9	7	10	33	31	60
Trenelle	26	7	10	9	37	41	57
Golden Star	26	9	4	13	32	44	57
Morne	26	8	6	12	28	40	56
Espoir	26	8	4	14	30	49	54
Aiglon (R)	26	6	3	17	33	74	47
US Robert (R)	26	5	5	16	22	47	45
Emulation (R)	26	2	6	18	18	56	38

Win = 4 points, Draw = 2 points, Loss = 1 point

PUERTO RICO

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Academia Quintana*	20	17	2	1	85	10	53
Metropolitan*	20	15	4	1	86	12	49
Ponce* (C)	20	15	2	3	72	14	47
Puerto Rico Surf*	20	14	1	5	67	16	43
Caguas Sporting	20	11	4	5	65	24	37
San Juan	20	8	2	10	47	27	26
Edusoccer	20	7	2	11	35	47	23
Taurinos de Cayey	20	5	4	11	44	45	19
Guayama	20	5	1	14	27	72	16
Guaynabo	20	2	0	18	21	78	6
Mayaguez	20	0	0	20	7	211	0

*Advance to next stage

Semi-Finals

Jun 6-7: Metropolitan 0-0 Ponce (*Ponce win 4-3 on pens*); Academia Quintana 0-0 Puerto Rico Surf (*Academia Quintana win 5-3 on pens*)

Final

Jun 14: Academia Quintana 1-3 Ponce

ST KITTS & NEVIS

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
United Old Road Jets*	18	16	2	0	67	14	50
Newtown United*	18	11	1	6	49	34	34
Cayon*	18	11	1	6	35	22	34
St Peters*	18	9	4	5	38	29	31
Village Superstars	18	9	4	5	43	23	29
St Paul's United	18	11	1	6	35	21	28
Conaree	18	4	4	10	30	45	16
Dieppe Bay Eagles	18	3	2	13	17	58	11
Sandy Point (R)	18	1	5	12	11	39	8
Bath United (R)	18	1	4	13	16	56	7

*Advance to next stage

Super Four

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
United Old Road Jets* (C)	3	3	0	0	7	2	9
St Peters*	3	1	1	1	5	2	4
Cayon	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Newtown United	3	0	0	3	0	8	0

*Advance to final

Final

May 15: United Old Road Jets 1-0 St Peters
May 18:
St Peters 2-4 United Old Road Jets (agg 2-5)

ASIA

BAHRAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Muharraq (C)	22	17	4	1	45	7	55
Al Khaldiya	22	18	0	4	42	16	54
Al Riffa	22	15	4	3	41	17	49
Malkiya	22	9	6	7	23	16	33
A'Ali	22	9	4	9	19	20	31
Al Hidd	22	8	6	8	29	23	30
Al Ahli	22	7	6	9	28	28	27
Sitra	22	7	6	9	22	31	27
Budaiya*	22	6	4	12	24	34	22
Al-Najma*	22	6	4	12	21	35	22
Al-Shabab (R)	22	3	5	14	8	34	14
Bahrain SC (R)	22	2	1	19	15	56	7

*Enter promotion-relegation play-offs

Promotion-Relegation Play-Offs

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Najma*	3	3	0	0	8	3	9
Manama Club (P)	3	2	0	1	6	3	6
Budaiya (R)	3	1	0	2	1	4	3
Al Ittihad*	3	0	0	3	1	6	0

*Remain in their respective divisions

BANGLADESH

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bashundara Kings (C)	18	12	5	1	42	18	41
Dhaka Abahani	18	11	4	3	37	15	37
Fortis	18	10	5	3	31	13	35
Bangladesh Police	18	6	9	3	19	15	27
Mohammedan	18	6	5	7	27	20	23
Rahmatgonj MFS	18	6	5	7	21	25	23
Brothers Union	18	4	5	9	18	29	17
PWDSC	18	4	5	9	15	28	17
Arambagh (R)	18	3	5	10	12	28	14
Fakirerpool (R)	18	2	4	12	13	44	10

INDONESIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Persib Bandung (C)	34	24	7	3	59	22	79
Borneo Samarinda	34	25	4	5	74	31	79
Persija	34	22	5	7	65	29	71
Persebaya	34	16	10	8	61	35	58
Bhayangkara Presisi	34	16	5	13	53	45	53
Malut United	34	15	8	11	68	53	53
Dewa United	34	16	5	13	44	37	53
Bali United	34	14	9	11	57	48	51
Arema	34	13	9	12	53	47	48
Persita	34	13	6	15	38	37	45
PSIM	34	11	12	11	43	44	45
Persik	34	11	6	17	42	61	39
Persijap	34	9	9	16	31	45	36
Madura United	34	9	8	17	37	54	35
PSM	34	8	10	16	39	49	34
Persis Solo (R)	34	8	10	16	39	59	34
Semen Padang (R)	34	5	5	24	22	65	20
PSBS (R)	34	4	6	24	31	95	18

IRAQ

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Quwa Al Jawiya (C)	38	27	8	3	62	28	89
Al Shorta	38	25	7	6	71	29	82
Erbil	38	23	10	5	59	32	79
Al Zawraa	38	17	15	6	50	32	66
Al Karma	38	17	14	7	53	26	65
Al Talaba	38	18	11	9	53	38	65
Al Karkh	38	16	12	10	51	41	60
Newroz	38	16	6	16	48	47	54
Zakho	38	14	11	13	49	45	53
Duhok	38	13	11	14	44	45	50
Al Naft	38	11	15	12	33	34	48
Diyala	38	13	9	16	39	46	48
Al Mosul	38	11	14	13	46	49	47
Al Gharraf	38	11	11	16	40	43	44
Al Minaa	38	10	12	16	41	47	42
Naft Maysan	38	11	9	18	46	58	42
Al Kahrabaa	38	12	5	21	47	56	41
Amanat Baghdad* (R)	38	10	7	21	47	68	37
Al Najaf (R)	38	7	4	27	33	70	25
Al Qasim (R)	38	0	5	33	20	98	5

*Enter promotion-relegation play-off
Jun 8: Amanat Baghdad 0-1 Karbala'a
Jun 13: Karbala'a 1-0 Amanat Baghdad (agg 2-0)

JAPAN

J1 100-Year Vision League East Region

	P	W	PW	PL	L	GD	Pts
Kashima Antlers	18	13	2	2	1	+20	45
FC Tokyo	18	9	4	2	3	+12	37
Machida Zelvia	18	8	5	3	2	+4	37
Kawasaki Frontale	18	7	3	1	7	−4	28
Tokyo Verdy	18	7	3	1	7	−6	28
Urawa Reds	18	7	0	4	7	+7	25
Yokohama F. Marinos	18	6	0	2	10	−1	20
Kashiwa Reysol	18	6	1	0	11	−3	20
Mito HollyHock	18	2	4	4	8	−16	18
JEF United Chiba	18	3	0	3	12	−13	12

Win = 3 points, Penalty Win = 2 points, Penalty Loss = 1 point, Loss = 0 points

J1 100-Year Vision League West Region

	P	W	PW	PL	L	GD	Pts
Vissel Kobe (C)	18	9	2	4	3	+6	35
Cerezo Osaka	18	7	4	2	5	+7	31
Nagoya Grampus	18	8	2	3	5	+3	31
Sanfrecce Hiroshima	18	8	2	2	6	+8	30
Gamba Osaka	18	5	5	3	5	+4	28
Fagiano Okayama	18	6	2	4	6	-1	26
Shimizu S-Pulse	18	4	4	4	6	-2	24
Kyoto Sanga	18	5	3	2	8	-7	23
V-Varen Nagasaki	18	6	1	1	10	-8	21
Avispa Fukuoka	18	3	4	4	7	-10	21

Win = 3 points, Penalty Win = 2 points, Penalty Loss = 1 point, Loss = 0 points

19th-20th Play-Off
May 30: Avispa Fukuoka 2-2 JEF United Chiba
Jun 6:
JEF United Chiba 1-2 Avispa Fukuoka (agg 3-4)

17th-18th Play-Off
May 30: V-Varen Nagasaki 1-0 Mito HollyHock
Jun 6:
Mito HollyHock 0-1 V-Varen Nagasaki (agg 0-2)

15th-16th Play-Off
May 30: Kyoto Sanga 2-6 Kashiwa Reysol
Jun 6: Kashiwa Reysol 0-1 Kyoto Sanga (agg 6-3)

13th-14th Play-Off
May 31: Shimizu S-Pulse 1-1 Yokohama F. Marinos
Jun 6:
Yokohama F. Marinos 3-0 Shimizu S-Pulse (agg 4-1)

11th-12th Play-Off
May 31: Fagiano Okayama 1-1 Urawa Reds
Jun 6:
Urawa Reds 0-2 Fagiano Okayama (agg 1-3)

9th-10th Play-Off
May 30: Gamba Osaka 1-1 Tokyo Verdy
Jun 6: Tokyo Verdy 2-4 Gamba Osaka (agg 3-5)

7th-8th Play-Off
May 30:
Sanfrecce Hiroshima 2-1 Kawasaki Frontale
Jun 6:
Kawasaki Frontale 0-1 Sanfrecce Hiroshima (agg 1-3)

5th-6th Play-Off
May 30: Nagoya Grampus 2-2 Machida Zelvia
Jun 6: Machida Zelvia 2-1 Nagoya Grampus (agg 4-3, *AET*)

3rd-4th Play-Off
May 30: Cerezo Osaka 2-2 FC Tokyo
Jun 6: FC Tokyo 1-3 Cerezo Osaka (agg 3-5)

1st-2nd Play-Off
May 30: Vissel Kobe 5-0 Kashima Antlers
Jun 6: Kashima Antlers 2-0 Vissel Kobe (agg 2-5)

LEBANON

National Solidarity Tournament Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ansar* (C)	2	1	0	1	5	3	3
Ahed	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Safa	2	1	0	1	3	5	3

**Advance to final*

National Solidarity Tournament Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nejmeh*	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Jwaya	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Sagesse	2	0	0	2	1	3	0

**Advance to final*

Final
May 21:
Ansar 2-2 Nejmeh (*Ansar win 14-13 on pens*)

MALAYSIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Johor Darul Ta'zim (C)	24	23	1	0	117	10	70
Kuching City	24	16	5	3	45	14	53
Selangor	24	16	4	4	59	20	52
Kuala Lumpur City	24	12	7	5	40	29	43
Terengganu	24	10	6	8	39	34	36
Immigration	24	9	5	10	38	43	32
Negeri Sembilan	24	6	11	7	39	35	29
Penang	24	6	7	11	26	41	25
Sabah	24	5	8	11	29	44	23
DPMM	24	6	5	13	30	57	23
Melaka	24	4	7	13	18	45	19
Kelantan The Real Warriors	24	4	3	17	17	63	15
PDRM	24	2	5	17	17	79	11

OMAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Seeb (C)	26	21	4	1	59	14	67
Al Shabab	26	17	3	6	51	27	54
Al Nasr	26	16	5	5	35	20	53
Al Nahda	26	13	5	8	31	23	44
Bahla	26	12	4	10	39	32	40
Oman Club	26	11	6	9	27	28	39
Sohar	26	10	8	8	35	28	38
Sur Club	26	8	8	10	34	37	32
Dhofar	26	7	6	13	23	30	27
Al Samail	26	6	8	12	25	39	26
Saham	26	7	5	14	22	44	26
Ibri	26	7	2	17	27	52	23
Al Khaboora (R)	26	4	10	12	23	35	22
Al Rustaq (R)	26	3	6	17	24	46	15

PHILIPPINES

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Manila Digger	20	17	3	0	103	13	54
One Taguig	20	17	1	2	84	9	52
Dynamic Herb Cebu	20	13	3	4	70	21	42
Kaya–Iloilo	20	13	2	5	68	13	41
Stallion Laguna	20	9	6	5	58	22	33
Aguilas–UMak	20	10	2	8	45	28	32
Maharlika	20	9	2	9	43	35	29
Don Bosco Garelli Utd	20	5	0	15	32	74	15
Tuloy	20	3	2	15	27	119	11
Valenzuela PB-Mendiola	20	2	1	17	13	99	7
Philippine Army	20	0	2	18	14	124	2

• *Top six advance to championship round, bottom six enter classification round; points carried over in full*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Manila Digger (C)	25	18	6	1	109	17	60
One Taguig	25	18	4	3	91	15	58
Kaya–Iloilo	25	15	3	7	76	21	48
Dynamic Herb Cebu	25	14	6	5	74	25	48
Aguilas–UMak	25	12	4	9	51	34	40
Stallion Laguna	25	9	10	6	64	31	37

Classification Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maharlika	24	12	3	9	55	42	39
Don Bosco Garelli Utd	24	7	1	16	49	83	22
Tuloy	24	5	3	16	39	126	18
Valenzuela PB-Mendiola	24	3	2	19	21	109	11
Philippine Army	24	0	2	22	19	144	2

TAIWAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tainan City TSG (C)	21	13	5	3	44	19	44
New Taipei Hang Yuan	21	13	2	6	35	15	41
Sunny Bank AC Taipei	21	11	6	4	29	22	39
Taichung Futuro	21	11	1	9	34	22	34
Taichung Rock	21	8	6	7	28	30	30
Tatung	21	6	6	9	27	28	24
Taipower*	21	5	5	11	27	33	20
Ming Chuan University (R)	21	1	1	19	14	69	4

**Enter promotion-relegation play-off*
Jun 7: Taipower 3-0 Ming Chuan Desafio

VIETNAM

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cong An Hanoi (C)	26	20	4	2	58	22	64
The Cong-Viettel	26	15	9	2	39	21	54
Ninh Binh	26	15	6	5	53	31	51
Hanoi FC	26	14	4	8	48	30	46
Cong An Ho Chi Minh City	26	10	6	10	28	36	36
Thep Xanh Nam Dinh	26	9	8	9	33	32	35
Haiphong	26	9	5	12	37	36	32
Hong Linh Ha Tinh	26	7	8	11	15	29	29
Song Lam Nghe An	26	7	6	13	27	40	27
Hoang Anh Gia Lai	26	6	8	12	24	37	26
Dong A Thanh Hoa	26	5	10	11	26	38	25
SHB Da Nang	26	5	9	12	33	39	24
PVF-CAND* (R)	26	5	9	12	26	44	24
Becamex Ho Chi Minh City (R)	26	6	6	14	31	43	24

**Enter promotion-relegation play-off*
Jun 12: PVF-CAND 1-1 Bac Ninh
(*Bac Ninh win 5-4 on pens*)

AFRICA

ALGERIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
MC Alger (C)	30	20	5	5	41	18	65
JS Saoura	30	16	7	7	40	26	55
CR Belouizdad	30	14	11	5	47	24	53
MC Oran	30	14	7	9	36	31	49
JS Kabylie	30	11	12	7	40	31	45
Olympique Akbou	30	12	9	9	34	31	45
USM Khenchela	30	12	8	10	37	37	44
ES Ben Aknoun	30	11	10	9	41	39	43
CS Constantine	30	11	10	9	35	30	43
USM Alger	30	8	15	7	34	29	39
ES Setif	30	10	9	11	33	36	39
MB Rouissat	30	9	9	12	30	35	36
ASO Chlef	30	9	7	14	26	31	34
Paradou (R)	30	7	3	20	35	54	24
ES Mostaganem (R)	30	4	7	19	18	52	19
MC El Bayadh (R)	30	2	11	17	17	40	17

ANGOLA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Petro Atletico (C)	30	22	6	2	63	15	72
Wiliete	30	18	8	4	49	29	62
1° de Agosto	30	15	12	3	47	22	57
Desportivo Huila	30	12	10	8	35	26	46
Kabuscorp	30	10	12	8	26	22	42
Bravos do Maquis	30	12	6	12	33	30	42
Interclube	30	9	13	8	35	28	40
Lunda Sul	30	9	11	10	27	29	38
1° de Maio	30	10	7	13	29	33	37
Sagrada Esperanca	30	8	12	10	34	40	36
Sao Salvador	30	9	8	13	27	33	35
Academica	30	8	11	11	25	30	35
CRD Libolo	30	9	7	14	26	37	34
Luanda City (R)	30	9	6	15	21	45	33
Redonda (R)	30	5	6	19	15	47	21
Guelson (R)	30	6	3	21	24	50	21

BOTSWANA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gaborone United (C)	30	23	5	2	62	15	74
Jwaneng Galaxy	30	17	8	5	55	23	59
Sua Flamingoes	30	18	5	7	44	30	59
Mochudi Centre Chiefs	30	16	8	6	37	18	56
Morupule Wanderers	30	14	5	11	41	33	47
Orapa United	30	12	11	7	35	30	47
Township Rollers	30	13	6	11	33	34	45
Nico United	30	10	12	8	28	25	42
TAFIC	30	8	11	11	27	26	35
Matebele	30	8	9	13	29	37	33
Police XI	30	7	11	12	18	29	32
Botswana Defence Force	30	7	9	14	30	42	30
Extension Gunners	30	7	8	15	26	43	29
Black Lions (R)	30	7	6	17	17	38	27
Santa Green (R)	30	6	4	20	23	58	22
Calendar Stars (R)	30	5	6	19	19	43	21

BURKINA FASO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rahimo (C)	30	20	9	1	47	15	69
USFA	30	12	13	5	31	17	49
Sporting	30	10	13	7	25	18	43
AS Douanes	30	10	13	7	29	29	43
Majestic	30	11	10	9	26	27	43
CFFEB	30	10	10	10	25	25	40
Salitas	30	10	10	10	29	31	40
Rail Club du Kadiogo	30	10	8	12	27	27	38
ASFA/Yennenga	30	9	11	10	24	28	38
Vitesse	30	9	10	11	25	25	37
Real du Faso	30	9	10	11	21	23	37
ASF Bobo-Dioulasso	30	9	10	11	25	31	37
AS SONABEL*	30	8	12	10	24	28	36
Etoile Filante Ouagadougou* (R)	30	7	12	11	22	29	33
RC Bobo-Dioulasso (R)	30	6	9	15	11	28	27
AJEB de Bobo-Dioulasso (R)	30	6	8	16	27	37	26

**Enter promotion-relegation play-off*
May 16: US Comoe 2-0 Etoile Filante Ouagadougou; AS SONABEL 2-0 KOZAF
May 23-24: Etoile Filante Ouagadougou 1-2 US Comoe (agg 1-4); KOZAF 0-3 AS SONABEL (agg 0-5)

BURUNDI

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Aigle Noir (C)	30	21	8	1	62	25	71
Musongati	30	17	8	5	43	22	59
Flambeau du Centre	30	16	8	6	42	23	56
Royal Vision	30	17	2	11	47	31	53
Rukinzo	30	14	8	8	49	28	50
Vital'O	30	14	8	8	45	27	50
Bumamuru	30	14	7	9	47	34	49
Muzinga	30	11	10	9	37	38	43
Olympic Star	30	10	9	11	37	36	39
Kayanza United	30	8	12	10	40	45	36
Le Messager Ngozi	30	8	9	13	31	33	33
Ngozi City	30	8	9	13	37	43	33
Inter Star	30	8	8	14	37	42	32
Dynamik (R)	30	8	5	17	35	58	29
Garage Express (R)	30	3	9	18	15	61	18
BG Green Farmers (R)	30	1	4	25	26	84	7

DJIBOUTI

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Port (C)	18	11	4	3	40	15	37
ASAS Djibouti Telecom	18	10	5	3	31	14	35
Garde-Cotes	18	8	7	3	22	17	31
Arta	18	8	5	5	33	22	29
Garde	18	7	5	6	18	21	26
Gendarmerie	18	8	2	8	25	21	26
Dikhil	18	6	7	5	18	18	25
Arta/Solar7	18	6	4	8	29	32	22
Obock (R)	18	2	5	11	22	48	11
JJ/Sapeur Pompier (R)	18	1	2	15	23	53	5

EGYPT

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zamalek	20	13	4	3	32	13	43
Pyramids	20	13	4	3	33	15	43
Al Ahly	20	11	7	2	33	19	40
Ceramica Cleopatra	20	11	5	4	29	16	38
Al Masry	20	8	8	4	29	20	32
Smouha	20	8	7	5	21	13	31
ENPPI	20	7	9	4	20	16	30
ZED	20	7	8	5	21	16	29
Wadi Degla	20	7	8	5	23	20	29
El Gouna	20	6	10	4	16	15	28
National Bank of Egypt	20	5	11	4	18	14	26
Petrojet	20	5	10	5	21	23	25
Modern Sport	20	5	8	7	18	24	23
Tala'ea El Gaish	20	5	7	8	14	24	22
Al Ittihad	20	6	2	12	15	24	20
Ghazl El Mahalla	20	2	13	5	12	15	19
Al Mokawloon Al Arab	20	3	9	8	13	21	18
Haras El Hodoud	20	4	5	11	15	29	17
Kahrabaa Ismailia	20	4	4	12	22	37	16
Pharco	20	2	9	9	8	22	15
Ismaily	20	3	2	15	11	28	11

• *Top seven advance to championship round, bottom 14 enter relegation round; points carried over in full*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zamalek (C)	6	4	1	1	7	4	56
Pyramids	6	3	2	1	10	6	54
Al Ahly	6	4	1	1	11	5	53
Ceramica Cleopatra	6	1	3	2	5	5	44
Al Masry	6	2	2	2	6	9	40
ENPPI	6	1	3	2	7	9	36
Smouha	6	0	0	6	2	10	31

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wadi Degla	13	6	6	1	42	29	53
ZED	13	5	5	3	39	31	49
National Bank of Egypt	13	6	4	3	38	30	48
El Gouna	13	4	6	3	26	24	46
Petrojet	13	5	5	3	39	38	45
Ghazl El Mahalla	13	4	7	2	27	26	38
Al Mokawloon Al Arab	13	4	8	1	28	31	38
Modern Sport	13	2	8	3	26	34	37
Tala'ea El Gaish	13	4	3	6	21	34	37
Al Ittihad	13	3	7	3	29	38	36
Kahrabaa Ismailia (R)	13	3	7	3	35	53	32
Haras El Hodoud (R)	13	1	6	6	26	48	26
Pharco (R)	13	2	4	7	15	35	25
Ismaily (R)	13	1	6	6	15	40	20

ESWATINI

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nsingizini Hotspurs (C)	30	20	5	5	44	14	65
Manzini Sea Birds	30	17	5	8	48	28	56
Young Buffaloes	30	16	6	8	43	23	54
Green Mamba	30	12	12	6	30	22	48
Mbabane Highlanders	30	12	10	8	40	29	46
Moneni Pirates	30	11	11	8	31	22	44
Mbabane Swallows	30	12	8	10	33	27	44
Royal Leopard	30	11	11	8	51	37	44
Tabankulu Celtics	30	12	5	13	34	32	41
Rangers	30	10	10	10	29	28	40
Ezulwini United	30	10	9	11	32	33	39
Ubombo Sugar	30	9	8	13	25	38	35
Amawele*	30	8	8	14	24	37	32
Malanti Chiefs (R)	30	7	9	14	20	37	30
Sisonkhe (R)	30	7	6	17	21	48	27
Manzini Wanderers (R)	30	2	5	23	17	67	11

**Enter promotion-relegation play-offs*

Promotion-Relegation Play-Offs

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Amawele	3	2	0	1	4	2	6
Madlenya	3	2	0	1	3	2	6
Magwanyana	3	2	0	1	3	3	6
Viva Stumbo	3	0	0	3	1	4	0

• *All teams remain in their respective divisions*

GHANA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Medeama (C)	34	17	11	6	52	28	62
Bibiani Gold Stars	34	19	3	12	46	40	60
Hearts of Oak	34	13	15	6	25	15	54
Dreams	34	15	7	12	49	33	52
Samartex	34	13	11	10	26	25	50
Aduana	34	13	11	10	29	24	50
Berekum Chelsea	34	14	8	12	35	33	50
Asante Kotoko	34	13	10	11	41	29	49
Karela United	34	13	10	11	32	33	49
Bechem United	34	13	8	13	38	39	47
Vision	34	12	11	11	38	34	47
Holy Stars	34	13	7	14	31	39	46
Young Apostles	34	12	9	13	37	37	45
Heart of Lions	34	12	9	13	36	33	45
Swedru All Blacks	34	12	9	13	34	31	45
Nations (R)	34	12	8	14	30	31	44
Hohoe United (R)	34	7	9	18	22	50	30
Eleven Wonders (R)	34	3	4	27	26	73	13

GUINEA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Horoya (C)	26	17	5	4	42	19	56
Hafia	26	15	7	4	34	16	52
Kamsar	26	15	3	8	37	21	48
Kaloum	26	12	9	5	32	18	45
Milo	26	11	10	5	33	18	43
Wakriya	26	8	9	9	22	26	33
Forces	26	9	5	12	31	35	32
Mineurs	26	7	8	11	22	28	29
Ashanti Golden Boys	26	7	8	11	23	32	29
Karfamoriah	26	7	7	12	24	33	28
Guinee Foot Elite	26	7	7	12	30	42	28
Renaissance Caiman Club	26	7	7	12	25	31	28
Renaissance (R)	26	6	8	12	20	35	26
Loubha (R)	26	4	7	15	14	35	19

IVORY COAST

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
ASEC Abidjan (C)	30	19	5	6	50	21	62
San-Pedro	30	14	10	6	43	32	52
Academie de FAD Plateau	30	14	8	8	40	24	50
Mouna	30	14	6	10	42	30	48
Tchologo	30	12	9	9	29	29	45
Stade d'Abidjan	30	12	7	11	30	28	43
Stella d'Adjame	30	11	9	10	28	28	42
SOL	30	12	3	15	33	46	39
Korhogo	30	10	8	12	31	32	38
Bouake	30	9	11	10	24	25	38
SO l'Armee	30	9	10	11	23	23	37
Inova SCA	30	10	6	14	16	27	36
Agboville	30	8	10	12	20	30	34
Zoman	30	8	9	13	20	32	33
Olympique Sport (R)	30	8	8	14	27	40	32
Racing d'Abidjan (R)	30	6	9	15	24	33	27

KENYA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gor Mahia (C)	34	20	9	5	50	22	69
Leopards	34	19	7	8	44	28	64
Police	34	13	16	5	31	21	55
Nairobi United	34	14	11	9	44	34	53
Shabana	34	14	10	10	35	34	52
Kakamega Homeboyz	34	12	13	9	47	37	49
KCB	34	13	9	12	36	37	48
Muranga SEAL	34	13	8	13	42	41	47
Tusker	34	13	6	15	27	32	45
Bomet	34	11	11	12	37	35	44
Mara Sugar	34	10	14	10	30	30	44
Bandari	34	9	17	8	26	26	44
Ulinzi Stars	34	11	8	15	34	37	41
Mathare United	34	11	8	15	31	35	41
Posta Rangers	34	9	13	12	31	40	40
Kariobangi Sharks (R)	34	8	14	12	30	33	38
Bidco United (R)	34	5	12	17	19	40	27
Sofapaka (R)	34	3	10	21	19	51	19

LESOTHO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lijabatho (C)	30	19	8	3	63	18	65
Lifofane	30	18	6	6	44	24	60
Bantu	30	17	8	5	51	26	59
Matlama	30	16	10	4	38	22	58
Majantja	30	15	9	6	41	28	54
Defence Force	30	13	11	6	40	26	50
Lioli	30	13	11	6	37	24	50
Linare	30	13	7	10	42	31	46
Correctional Services	30	12	9	9	31	26	45
LMPS	30	6	15	9	29	30	33
Manonyane	30	5	10	15	34	52	25
Machokha	30	6	6	18	17	39	24
Limkokwing University	30	5	8	17	24	48	23
Members	30	5	7	18	22	55	22
Liphakoe (R)	30	3	12	15	16	40	21
Maroala (R)	30	3	5	22	17	57	14

LIBERIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Watanga (C)	26	16	8	2	40	20	56
BEA Mountain	26	15	7	4	56	22	52
Fassell	26	13	8	5	31	17	47
LPRC Oilers	26	11	8	7	36	29	41
LISCR	26	12	5	9	31	33	41
Paynesville	26	10	8	8	41	42	38
Discoveries	26	9	8	9	31	23	35
Wologizi	26	9	7	10	38	40	34
Heaven Eleven	26	7	11	8	33	35	32
Borough	26	6	9	11	33	44	27
Down Town	26	7	6	13	32	44	27
Gardnersville	26	7	6	13	36	51	27
Black Man Warriors	26	4	8	14	16	28	20
Freeport	26	4	5	17	38	64	17
Jubilee	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

LIBYA

Regular Season Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ahly Tripoli*	18	15	2	1	47	9	47
Asswehly*	18	13	4	1	35	9	43
Al Madina*	18	7	4	7	21	23	25
Al Khums	18	6	5	7	20	29	23
Al Watan	18	6	5	7	14	18	23
Assabah	18	6	4	8	12	18	22
Libyan Stadium	18	5	5	8	15	21	20
Al Qadisiyah** (R)	18	6	2	10	11	24	19
Al Dhahra (R)	18	3	5	10	20	27	14
Abu Salim (R)	18	3	4	11	13	30	13

*Advance to next stage
**Deducted 1 point

Regular Season Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ittihad*	16	13	3	0	35	9	42
Olympic Azzaweya*	16	9	4	3	25	11	31
Al Ittihad Misratah*	16	7	6	3	21	11	27
Al Majd	16	6	5	5	14	13	23
Al Shomooa	16	6	4	6	24	19	22
Shabab Al Ghar	16	4	6	6	17	27	18
Al Tersana (R)	16	3	7	6	15	23	16
Ittihad Gharyan (R)	16	2	4	10	10	25	10
Abe Al Ashher (R)	16	1	3	12	9	32	6

*Advance to next stage

Regular Season Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Military Union*	16	10	5	1	26	9	35
Al Hilal Benghazi*	16	10	4	2	20	11	34
Al Ahly Benghazi*	16	9	6	1	23	6	33
Al Ta'awon	16	8	5	3	22	13	29
Al Sadaqa	16	5	4	7	16	17	19
Darnes	16	4	5	7	15	19	17
Al Anwar (R)	16	1	8	7	12	23	11
Al Borouq (R)	16	2	4	10	7	21	10
Al Suqur (R)	16	1	3	12	13	35	6

*Advance to next stage

Regular Season Group 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Nasr*	14	11	2	1	28	7	35
Al Akhdar*	14	8	4	2	16	9	28
Al Afreky*	14	7	2	5	29	18	23
Al Tahaddy	14	5	6	3	21	14	21
Khaleej Sirte	14	5	4	5	25	22	19
Al Wefaq Ajdabiya	14	5	3	6	13	17	18
Al Moroj (R)	14	4	1	9	16	24	13
Al Andalus (R)	14	0	0	14	1	38	0

*Advance to next stage

Championship Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Asswehly* (C)	5	4	1	0	8	1	13
Al Ahly Tripoli	5	3	2	0	4	1	11
Al Ittihad	5	2	2	1	5	4	8
Al Madina	5	1	1	3	5	9	4
Olympic Azzaweya	5	1	0	4	7	10	3
Al Ittihad Misratah	5	0	2	3	2	6	2

*Advance to final

Championship Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Nasr*	5	4	1	0	9	5	13
Al Akhdar	5	3	2	0	9	5	11
Al Ahly Benghazi	5	3	0	2	9	6	9
Military Union	5	1	2	2	4	5	5
Al Hilal Benghazi	5	1	1	3	4	7	4
Al Afreky	5	0	0	5	4	11	0

*Advance to final

Final

Jun 6:
Asswehly 1-1 Al Nasr (*Asswehly win 5-4 on pens*)

MAURITANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nouadhibou (C)	26	17	7	2	49	15	58
Nzeidane	26	13	7	6	42	35	46
Douane	26	12	9	5	40	29	45
Pompiers	26	11	11	4	29	22	44
Nouakchott Academy	26	10	9	7	32	22	39
Gendrim	26	9	10	7	26	29	37
Chemal	26	10	6	10	34	35	36
Nouakchott Kings	26	8	10	8	37	34	34
SNIM	26	7	12	7	29	28	33
Tevragh-Zeina	26	7	11	8	34	33	32
Police	26	5	11	10	28	31	26
Kaedi	26	5	8	13	21	37	23
Ksar (R)	26	4	5	17	23	48	17
Inter Nouakchott (R)	26	3	6	17	24	50	15

MAURITIUS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
La Cure Waves (C)	18	14	1	3	50	20	43
Pamplemousses	18	12	3	3	35	14	39
Chebel Citizen	18	11	3	4	28	13	36
Cercle de Joachim	18	8	4	6	33	21	28
AS Riviere du Rempart	18	8	4	6	33	27	28
ASPL 2000	18	7	3	8	26	29	24
Petite Riviere Noire	18	7	3	8	23	24	24
AS Vacoas-Phoenix	18	7	2	9	24	23	23
USBBRH (R)	18	1	5	12	15	46	8
PAS Mates (R)	18	0	2	16	10	60	2

NIGERIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Enugu Rangers (C)	38	19	11	8	47	27	68
Rivers United	38	19	10	9	44	31	67
Shooting Stars	38	18	6	14	41	40	60
Ikorodu City	38	16	10	12	43	39	58
Bendel Insurance	38	14	14	10	44	38	56
Nasarawa United	38	16	8	14	37	34	56
Abia Warriors	38	16	7	15	31	34	55
Barau	38	13	13	12	34	30	52
Katsina United	38	14	10	14	36	39	52
Plateau United	38	15	5	18	39	40	50
Enyimba	38	13	10	15	44	42	49
Kun Khalifat	38	13	10	15	42	40	49
Warri Wolves	38	13	10	15	36	41	49
Niger Tornadoes	38	13	9	16	37	36	48
Kano Pillars	38	15	6	17	34	39	48
Kwara United	38	13	11	14	32	36	47
Remo Stars (R)	38	14	5	19	42	47	47
El Kanemi Warriors (R)	38	13	8	17	27	46	47
Bayelsa United (R)	38	11	10	17	37	42	43
Wikki Tourists (R)	38	9	13	16	36	48	40

RWANDA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal Omdurman*	34	23	6	5	74	25	75
APR (C)	34	19	11	4	50	28	68
Al Merreikh*	34	16	11	7	41	24	59
Rayon Sport	34	14	14	6	40	30	56
Kiyovu	34	13	14	7	34	21	53
Police	34	12	16	6	29	19	52
Mukura Victory Sports	34	12	11	11	36	38	47
Marines	34	12	9	13	47	43	45
Bugesera	34	12	8	14	34	39	44
Musanze	34	11	10	13	38	37	43
Gorilla	34	10	10	14	31	42	40
Gicumbi	34	10	8	16	38	54	38
Etincelles	34	7	16	11	32	40	37
AS Kigali	34	8	11	15	27	39	35
Gasogi United	34	8	11	15	29	44	35
Amagaju	34	9	8	17	19	38	35
Muhanga (R)	34	8	7	19	25	46	31
Rutsiro (R)	34	6	11	17	30	47	29

*Invited guests taking part due to civil war in Sudan

SENEGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Teungueth (C)	30	13	15	2	21	6	54
AJEL de Rufisque	30	15	9	6	27	19	54
Generation Foot	30	13	9	8	37	22	48
US Goree	30	11	15	4	29	14	48
Wally Daan	30	10	14	6	29	24	44
Ouakam	30	8	18	4	23	16	42
Jaraaf	30	9	14	7	21	16	41
Casa Sports	30	7	19	4	29	20	40
Pikine	30	8	12	10	22	19	36
Mbour	30	5	18	7	18	21	33
ASC HLM Nationale	30	5	17	8	18	26	32
Dakar Sacre-Coeur	30	5	16	9	24	37	31
Guediawaye	30	7	8	15	29	34	29
Linguere	30	3	16	11	22	36	25
Sonacos (R)	30	4	13	13	18	39	25
ASC Camberene (R)	30	3	15	12	16	34	24

SEYCHELLES

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Foresters (C)	18	13	0	5	38	21	39
Cote d'Or	18	12	2	4	40	21	38
Bazar Brothers	18	9	5	4	34	20	32
Bel Air	18	9	4	5	25	23	31
Anse Reunion	18	8	3	7	26	22	27
Real Maldives	18	7	4	7	35	28	25
Light Stars	18	6	4	8	20	26	22
Saint Louis	18	6	2	10	20	27	20
Saint Michel United* (R)	18	4	3	11	32	43	15
Revengers (R)	18	2	1	15	16	55	7

*Enter promotion-relegation play-off
May 26: Rovers 4-1 Saint Michel United
May 29: Saint Michel United 4-3 Rovers (agg 5-7)

SOUTH AFRICA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Orlando Pirates (C)	30	21	6	3	58	12	69
Mamelodi Sundowns	30	20	8	2	57	21	68
Kaizer Chiefs	30	15	9	6	33	19	54
AmaZulu	30	13	8	9	32	28	47
Sekhukhune United	30	11	11	8	32	27	44
Lamontville Golden Arrows	30	11	8	11	34	33	41
Polokwane City	30	9	13	8	21	21	40
Durban City	30	10	9	11	25	26	39
Stellenbosch	30	9	10	11	26	30	37
Siwelele	30	8	13	9	24	28	37
Richards Bay	30	7	13	10	23	30	34
TS Galaxy	30	8	8	14	30	38	32
Chippa United	30	6	10	14	24	44	28
Marumo Gallants	30	4	13	13	21	38	25
Magesi*	30	5	9	16	24	43	24
Orbit College (R)	30	6	6	18	21	47	24

*Enter promotion-relegation play-offs

Promotion-Relegation Play-Offs

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Milford (P)	4	2	1	1	3	2	7
Magesi (R)	4	1	2	1	4	3	5
Cape Town City*	4	1	1	2	2	4	4

*Remain in their respective division

SUDAN

Central Group

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ahli Madani*	10	10	0	0	24	6	30
Umm Maghd*	10	6	2	2	18	7	20
Al Hilal Managil	10	3	5	2	10	7	14
Al Ahli Khartoum	10	3	2	5	8	16	11
Al Rabita	10	2	1	7	6	15	7
El Merreikh Kosti	10	0	2	8	3	18	2

*Advance to next stage

East Group

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal Omdurman*	10	7	3	0	19	5	24
Al Hilal Al Sahil*	10	5	4	1	13	6	19
Al Taqadom	10	2	5	3	12	14	11
Al Shorta	10	2	3	5	7	9	9
Al Kober	10	2	2	6	4	16	8
Al Mirghani	10	0	7	3	9	14	7

*Advance to next stage

Nile Group

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
El Merreikh*	10	5	4	1	13	8	19
Al Falah Atbarah*	10	3	4	3	5	4	13
Al Ahli Merowe	10	2	6	2	7	6	12
Al Saham Ad Damar	10	2	6	2	10	9	12
Al Hilal Karima	10	3	2	5	11	17	11
Al Amal Atbarah	10	2	4	4	8	10	10

*Advance to next stage

West Group

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal El Fasher*	10	5	4	1	11	7	19
Hay Al Wadi*	10	4	3	3	14	13	15
Haidoub	10	4	3	3	13	8	15
El Fajer El Obeid	10	3	3	4	15	18	12
Al Zamala Ruwaba	10	3	2	5	11	12	11
El Merreikh El Obeid	10	3	1	6	14	20	10

*Advance to next stage

Championship Group

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal Omdurman (C)	7	7	0	0	16	1	21
Al Merreikh	7	6	0	1	21	4	18
Al Hilal Al Sahil	7	3	2	2	10	6	11
Al Ahli Madani	7	3	2	2	13	11	11
Umm Mughd	7	3	0	4	10	15	9
Al Hilal El Fasher	7	1	2	4	4	7	5
Hay Al Wadi	7	1	2	4	6	14	5
Al Falah Atbarah	7	0	0	7	2	24	0

TOGO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
ASCK (C)	26	18	6	2	41	13	60
ASKO Kara	26	17	5	4	37	19	56
Etoile Filante	26	12	4	10	19	14	40
Unisport	26	10	6	10	22	24	36
Dynamic Togolais	26	9	6	11	19	23	33
Entente II	26	8	9	9	17	16	33
Barracuda	26	8	8	10	18	21	32
Tambo	26	8	7	11	17	19	31
Semassi	26	8	7	11	19	24	31
Gbohloe-Su	26	7	10	9	16	18	31
Gomido	26	8	6	12	16	25	30
AS OTR	26	8	5	13	20	27	29
Binah (R)	26	6	11	9	20	25	29
Espoir (R)	26	5	10	11	13	26	25

TUNISIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Club Africain (C)	30	19	9	2	43	10	66
Esperance	30	18	9	3	45	11	63
CS Sfaxien	30	18	8	4	44	13	62
Stade Tunisien	30	12	12	6	28	14	48
US Monastir	30	11	12	7	28	19	45
ES Zarzis	30	11	8	11	30	28	41
Etoile du Sahel	30	11	8	11	28	30	41
ES Metlaoui	30	9	13	8	19	25	40
JS El Omrane	30	10	6	14	24	33	36
US Ben Guerdane	30	8	11	11	18	22	35
AS Marsa	30	11	2	17	26	33	35
CA Bizertin	30	8	9	13	18	29	33
Olympique Beja	30	9	5	16	18	39	32
JS Kairouan (R)	30	9	4	17	20	41	31
AS Soliman (R)	30	6	9	15	15	31	27
AS Gabes (R)	30	3	9	18	11	37	18

UGANDA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vipers (C)	30	19	10	1	55	17	67
Kampala City	30	19	5	6	46	22	62
SC Villa	30	18	7	5	47	17	61
Kitara	30	16	8	6	43	22	56
NEC	30	14	11	5	32	22	53
Entebbe UPPC	30	14	9	7	30	20	51
Police	30	13	8	9	42	35	47
Maroons	30	9	11	10	26	27	38
BUL	30	9	10	11	30	33	37
Express	30	9	10	11	28	31	37
URA	30	5	16	9	27	30	31
Mbarara City	30	6	8	16	26	47	26
Lugazi	30	5	10	15	19	36	25
UPDF (R)	30	5	7	18	24	41	22
Calvary (R)	30	4	9	17	14	39	21
Buhimba United Saints (R)	30	4	3	23	13	66	12

ZAMBIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Power Dynamos (C)	34	23	9	2	53	18	78
Red Arrows	34	17	12	5	44	22	63
MUZA	34	14	9	11	35	30	51
Kabwe Warriors	34	14	9	11	30	25	51
Nchanga Rangers	34	14	8	12	31	26	50
Green Eagles	34	13	11	10	29	25	50
Zanaco	34	14	8	12	30	30	50
Mufulira Wanderers	34	14	7	13	22	25	49
Konkola Blades	34	11	15	8	32	28	48
ZESCO United	34	13	8	13	39	30	47
Kansanshi Dynamos	34	10	13	11	28	26	43
Green Buffaloes	34	9	14	11	27	34	41
Nkana	34	9	12	13	23	30	39
Nkwazi	34	8	13	13	21	28	37
NAPSA Stars	34	8	12	14	25	33	36
Mutondo Stars	34	7	14	13	23	34	35
Prison Leopards (R)	34	7	13	14	25	37	34
Mines United (R)	34	3	9	22	19	55	18

OCEANIA

TAHITI

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tefana	9	7	2	0	41	10	32
Venus	9	7	1	1	35	16	31
Mira	9	5	2	2	30	13	26
Pirae	9	4	2	3	31	18	23
Tamarii Punaruu	9	4	1	4	17	22	22
Pueu	9	3	3	3	14	19	21
Dragon	9	3	2	4	33	17	20
Taiarapu	9	3	1	5	13	26	19
Central Sport	9	2	0	7	16	17	15
Jeunes Tahitiens	9	0	0	9	9	81	9

• *Top five advance to championship round, bottom five enter relegation round; points wiped out*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tefana (C)	15	12	1	2	61	15	52
Pirae	15	10	1	4	58	27	46
Mira	15	10	0	5	34	31	45
Tamarii Punaruu	15	5	1	9	25	52	31
Selection U19	15	4	0	11	26	52	27
Venus	15	2	1	12	20	47	22

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dragon	12	11	1	0	77	10	46
Jeunes Tahitiens	12	6	2	4	27	39	32
Central Sport	12	5	4	3	31	28	31
Pueu	12	4	1	7	21	34	25
Taiarapu (R)	12	0	0	12	14	59	11

Internationals

2027 ASIAN CUP

Third Round Qualifying

Group B

Jun 4 – Doha
Lebanon 0
Yemen 2 (Al Gahwashi 62, 90)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Yemen*	6	4	2	0	20	1	14
Lebanon	5	4	1	1	14	2	13
Bhutan	6	1	1	4	4	16	4
Brunei	6	1	0	5	3	22	3

**Qualify for 2027 Asian Cup*

2026 ASEAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Group Stage Fixtures

Group A

Jul 24:
Cambodia v Singapore; Timor-Leste v Vietnam
Jul 27:
Indonesia v Cambodia; Singapore v Timor-Leste
Jul 31:
Timor-Leste v Indonesia; Vietnam v Singapore
Aug 3:
Cambodia v Timor-Leste; Indonesia v Vietnam
Aug 7:
Vietnam v Cambodia; Singapore v Indonesia

Group B

Jul 25:
Myanmar v Malaysia; Laos v Thailand
Jul 28:
Philippines v Myanmar; Malaysia v Laos
Aug 1:
Laos v Philippines; Thailand v Malaysia
Aug 4:
Myanmar v Laos; Philippines v Thailand
Aug 8:
Thailand v Myanmar; Malaysia v Philippines

• *Knockout rounds take place Aug. 15-26, 2026*

FRIENDLIES

May 16 – Dublin
Republic of Ireland 5 (Cannon 46, 56, Moylan 62, 80, 84)
Grenada 0

May 23 – Puebla
Mexico 2 (Gutierrez 2, Martinez 54)
Ghana 0

May 26 – London
Nigeria 2 (Azeez 5, 63)
Zimbabwe 0

May 27 – London
India 0
Jamaica 2 (Clarke 8, Dixon 78)

May 28 – Cairo
Egypt 1 (Zico 65)
Russia 0

May 28 – Dublin
Republic of Ireland 1 (Collins 5)
Qatar 0

May 29 – Antalya
Iran 3 (Yousefi 47, Rezaeian 59, Taremi 68)
Gambia 1 (O. Colley 42)

May 29 – Johannesburg
South Africa 0
Nicaragua 0

May 29 – Sarajevo
Bosnia & Herzegovina 0
North Macedonia 0

May 29 – Girona
Iraq 1 (Yousif 20)
Andorra 0

May 30 – Glasgow
Scotland 4 (Curtis 45, Shankland 59, 64, Christie 81 pen)
Curacao 1 (Chong 17)

May 30 – London
Jamaica 0
Nigeria 3 (Yusuf 3, 90+1, Moffi 59)

May 30 – London
Zimbabwe 1 (Dube 35 pen)
India 0

May 31 – Harrison
Ecuador 2 (Porozo 35, A. Valencia 51)
Saudi Arabia 1 (Mandash 87)

May 31 – Provo
South Korea 5 (Son Heung-min 40, 43 pen, Cho Gue-sung 65, 77, Hwang Hee-chan 75 pen)
Trinidad & Tobago 0

May 31 – Pasadena
Mexico 1 (Vasquez 28)
Australia 0

May 31 – Tokyo
Japan 1 (Ogawa 87)
Iceland 0

May 31 – St Gallen
Switzerland 4 (Embolo 28 pen, Ndoye 33, Xhaka 45+9 pen, Fassnacht 79)
Jordan 1 (O. Fakhoury 52)

May 31 – Prague
Czech Republic 2 (Ladra 12, Hlozek 32)
Kosovo 1 (Emerllahu 80)

May 31 – Lisbon
Cape Verde 3 (K. Pina 11, L. Duarte 59, Benchimol 63)
Serbia 0

May 31 – Wroclaw
Poland 0
Ukraine 2 (Yaremchuk 34, Yarmolenko 44)

May 31 – Mainz
Germany 4 (Undav 34, 57, Wirtz 48, Musiala 63)
Finland 0

May 31 – Charlotte
United States 3 (Dest 7, Pulisic 20, Balogun 63)
Senegal 2 (Mane 44, 52)

May 31 – Rio de Janeiro
Brazil 6 (Vinicius Junior 2, Casemiro 39, Rayan 53, Paqueta 60, Igor Thiago 63 pen, Danilo Santos 81)
Panama 2 (Matheus Cunha 14 og, Harvey 83)

May 31 – Kallang
Singapore 4 (Safuwan 22 pen, Song Ui-young 38, Orkhon 58 og, Ikhsan 87)
Mongolia 0

• *June's international friendly results will be included in Results, Tables, Fixtures in August's 2026 World Cup review edition*

July 2026 *Vol. 66 No.12*

GROUP EDITOR
Stephen Fishlock

MANAGING EDITOR
Jamie Evans

DIGITAL MANAGING EDITOR
Jared Tinslay

DESIGN
Sean Phillips, atg-media.com

PICTURES
Pictures copyright: Getty Images

SPECIAL THANKS THIS ISSUE TO:
Keir Radnedge, Mark Gleeson, Liam Miller, Max Heermann, Lukas Vrablik & Steve Menary

EDITORIAL
Kelsey Media, The Granary, Downs Court, Yalding Hill, Yalding, Maidstone, Kent, ME18 6AL

ADVERTISING AND SPONSORSHIP
Smart Media Sales: Mike Allen
Tel. 07917 588 511
Email: mike@smartmediasales.co.uk

PUBLISHER Steve Brown
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF CONSUMER ADVERTISING Oswin Grady
OPERATIONS DIRECTOR Gill Lambert
PRINT PRODUCTION MANAGER Georgina Harris
PRINT PRODUCTION CONTROLLERS Hayley Brown & Kelly Orriss

DISTRIBUTION
Great Britain: Frontline Distribution Solutions
2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT
Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland: Newspread Tel: +353 23 886 3850

SUBSCRIPTIONS ORDER HOTLINE
+44 (0)1959 543 747
Lines open Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm

or visit: shop.kelsey.co.uk/world-soccer-magazine

SUBSCRIPTIONS RATES
Full annual subscription rate (13 issues)
UK: £113.62, EU & NA: £128.88, ROW: £140.88.

CONTACT US
Editorial: wos.ed@kelsey.co.uk
UK subscription & back issue orderline: 01959 543 747
Overseas subscription orderline: 0044 (0) 1959 543 747
Toll free USA subscription orderline: 1-888-777-0275
Customer service email address: cs@kelsey.co.uk
Customer service & subscription postal address:
World Soccer Customer Service Team, Kelsey Media, Media Centre, Morton Way, Horncastle, Lincolnshire, LN9 6JR

WorldSoccer is a member of

● La Gazzetta dello Sport (Italy) ● Kicker (Germany) ● Marca (Spain) ● Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany) ● ELF Voetbal (Netherlands) ● Fanatik (Turkey) ● A Bola (Portugal) ● De Telegraaf (Netherlands) ● Nemzeti Sport (Hungary) ● World Soccer (UK)

Antonio Simoes

England v Portugal

1966 World Cup, Wembley

The former Portugal and Benfica winger looks back to his country's first-ever World Cup appearance where, inspired by the great Eusebio, they made it to the semi-finals and a clash with the hosts

Semi-final...Portugal pose for a team photo ahead of their clash against England, with Simoes on the right of the bottom row

"I'm convinced that, had there been substitutions allowed at World Cup 1966, Portugal would have made the final.

As it was, we still got to the semi-final at Wembley against England, the match that stands out in my career, even above our great European exploits with Benfica.

I had already played five 90-minute games – we all had – by the time we got to Wembley. We were all shattered and I would have liked to play this game in a fresher condition, but that was what we had in those days. Just to be able to be withdrawn with 15 minutes to go would have saved our legs for the next match.

Nevertheless, we were elated to have got so far – 90,000 at Wembley, Portugal's first-ever World Cup semi-final, against the likes of Bobby Moore and Bobby Charlton.

My great friend Eusebio, who had been instrumental in getting us past the Brazilians, Hungarians and North Koreans, was our talisman. For my part, I was pitted against a small fellow with no hair and no teeth called Nobby Stiles. I have never seen a performance like his in the England midfield that night. He was relentless, stuck to me like a limpet. The exertion of the comeback against the Koreans had really taken it out of us, having to turn the tables from three-down to win 5-3.

For Wembley we were very well prepared. We were like a family, everyone looking out for each other. Eusebio and our captain, Mario Coluna, were our marshals, our chiefs. We really gave it our best shot. I was on the left flank with Stiles following my every step. I just could not shake him off.

I remember going on one run, cutting in past Bobby Moore and the ball squirted up off the inevitable Stiles. There was a brief chance of a penalty, but nothing was given.

It was an immense game played in an atmosphere of mutual respect. There was an amazing spirit during the game.

Even when Charlton got the second and the game was sealed, I remember Jose Augusto shaking Bobby's hand as we prepared to kick-off again.

Late goal... Eusebio converts from the penalty spot for Portugal

At 2-0, we were finished. But then, it was my ball into the box that Jose Torres headed goalwards, making Jackie Charlton handle it on the line. Eusebio smashed in the penalty and I recall my friend retrieving the ball from the net to restart as quickly as possible, but still having time to offer Gordon Banks a pat of consolation.

We gave absolutely everything. Coluna hit the bar as the minutes ticked away and the last chance fell my way. Torres nodded it down and, as I shaped to shoot, there was Stiles again, blocking it for a corner. I had been switched to the right wing for the second half but I still couldn't get rid of Stiles.

We had been on a true adventure. Unforgettable memories. To go out in this way was no shame at all and it will live with me forever. The spirit, the sportsmanship and the night I played at Wembley in the semi-final of a World Cup."

> "I was pitted against a small fellow with no hair and no teeth called Nobby Stiles. I have never seen a performance like his"

Interview by Simon Curtis for "The Thirteenth Chapter: From Eusebio to Ronaldo – Portugal's 50-year journey from football minnows to European champions"

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE JULY 31

Available from
WATERSTONES
and all good bookshops

pitch

amazon
Scan the QR code to go to our amazon store

PITCH PUBLISHING
WORLD CUP COLLECTION

NEW FOR 2026

Want the latest sports books straight to your inbox?
Sign up to our newsletter today **www.pitchpublishing.co.uk**

PitchPublishing